THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

BY

LUIGI SALVATORELLI

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The life of St. Francis of
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THE LIFE OF
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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by Luigi Salvatorelli

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

Eric Sutton

M C M XX VIII

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To the dear

and venerated memory of

my Mother and my maternal Uncle

ANNA AND LETO ALESSANDRI

natives of Assisi

who taught me to love St. Francis and

his city

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THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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CHAPTER ONE

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THE BACKGROUND

ON THE WAY DOWN FROM FLORENCE TOWARDS ROME, after Arezzo the character of the landscape changes. The sparkling variety and sharp contrasts of the Tuscan hills and mountains give way to scenery more uniform and more harmonious, and in lower relief; the brilliant, gay colours fade and melt away into more subdued tones of green and blue, dim and indistinct. Towards the west the mountains disappear into the distance, and the horizon widens until there comes into view a vast motionless mirror of the clearest water – Trasimene.

The memories of the Roman defeat, still surviving in the names and legends of the place (the village of Ossia and the river Sanguineto), cannot disturb the serenity of waters, mountains, and sky. Towards the east of the lake, immediately after Passignano, the country is covered with the most luxuriant vegetation, almost like that of the Riviera, and the landscape has a solemn and impressive beauty all its own. The western bank, flat and monotonous, gives the impression of lagoons; to the east the gentle undulations of a line of hills; to the south a confusion of heights, with all the charm of hills and the majesty of mountains, whose long, low curves disappear, one above another, into the pale misty blue of what seems an infinite horizon.

Past the lake, there soon appears, on the summit of a hill, Perugia, with the most splendid view in all Umbria. When you have at last reached the town – and this is best done on foot, along the lovely winding road, or up the quicker short cuts – all Umbria lies at your feet, though the traveller must not be content with the classic panorama from the Gardens at midday. He must brave the blasts of the *tramontana* and climb up to the viewpoint at the Porta Sole. The two semicircles meet like sky and earth on the horizon, and the one landscape is the complement of the other. On the one side the green loveliness of plain and hills disappearing into the infinite distance of the remote blue heights; on the other, not far off, the circle of the Apennines merging into the nameless mountains of Spoleto, Nocera, and Gualdo, as far as Catria, with its twin humps; towards the north, nearer and less lofty, Tezio and Acuto, beyond which the upper valley of the Tiber climbs up till it almost touches that of the Arno (La Verna lies in between). At the junction of the two semicircles lies Assisi, quite near as the crow flies, but, by a trick of the light, appearing dimly and mysteriously distant.

On the way down from Perugia to the plain two valleys face the traveller, separated by a hilly plateau, elliptical in shape. On the southwest lies the Tiber valley, and above it Todi; the valley of the Chiascio – it should more properly be named after its tributary, the Topino (out of which flows the Clitumnus) – lies to the southeast, with the city of Spoleto high up at the head. Farther on (that is, to the west), beyond the Tiber valley, lies the ancient Etru-

ria, Tuscany of the Middle Ages; Chiusi, Città della Pieve, Acquapendente, Orvieto. Farther still, to the east of the Spoleto valley, rise the Apennines from Umbria to the Marches.

Which of the two valleys, that of Tiber or Spoleto, is the more beautiful it is hard to decide. The first section of road from Perugia to Orvieto, which runs along the summit of the hills, looks down upon the broad green valley of the Tiber below: one of the most beautiful views in Italy. From beneath, the outline of the heights above the western slope of the valley is here and there sharp and hard, Tuscan and Etruscan; while to the east the landscape, from Deruta below to Collazzone above, towards the watershed, has all the Umbrian sweetness and solemnity. Leaving the valley of the Tiber at Todi and skirting the elliptical plateau (the last part of which has all the height and majesty of a mountain), you come upon the other valley, that of Spoleto. Here all is Umbrian, the essential Umbria. On the east are mountains, some wooded and others bare and rocky, with large curves and gentle slopes; on the west, the key of Umbria, the scenery is the same, reaching down to the hills from Montefalco to Bettona. Plain, hills, and mountains meet and melt into hues of grey and azure, a confusion of lines and light and colour.

Umbria, shut away as it is in the exact centre of Italy, lacks the restless and voluptuous brilliance of the Ligurian and Tuscan seaboard; its mountains have nothing of the gigantic grandeur of the Alps, remote and hostile. A country of hills and low mountains, similar to those of Tuscany,

its scenery, like Tuscan scenery, exalts the mind with its persuasive charm without weighing it down by a sense of overwhelming awe. And yet, beneath an appearance of similarity, it differs profoundly in form and spirit from the Tuscan landscape. Tuscany is a country of more varied curves, more delicate articulations, clearer and at times more flowing lines, more vivid and more various colours. Umbria is a country of long, regular masses, vague and sweeping curves, dim, confused colours. The outlines are enfolded in a sort of impalpable mist, which does not hide them, but smoothes away their inequalities; the entire land is enwrapped and transfigured by a soft, ethereal light. The air of that country is one of sweet austerity, without a touch of hardness or merely sensual charm, a very breath from the Infinite. Whoever passes from Liguria into Tuscany and so to Umbria (they lie adjacent to each other and are the three most beautiful and most characteristic provinces of Italy) finds in Liguria the triumph of colour, in Tuscany the reign of form, and in Umbria the perfection of line. The first is a land of the senses; in the second, sense and spirit are balanced; in the third, the spirit has conquered and is supreme. Of all the parts of Italy Umbria is the nearest to God.

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Assisi appears, looking at the city from Perugia, as one leans against the high parapet at the top of the Porta Marzia, like a rose-pale blur enveloped in cloud. When, on the other hand, one climbs up to it from the plain of Santa

Maria degli Angeli, the city stands out clear and luminous, rising up in long, slender tiers, one above the other, from San Francesco, with its vast monastic buildings, to the tall, graceful campanile of Santa Chiara, and higher still to the dark and heavy tower of the cathedral. The city is built entirely from the pink and light grey stone of Subasio, and its ivory patina gives it a look of something very old and very precious, and it seems to glow with an almost oriental splendour. This is especially observable when the sunset is more than usually bright; then the great ridge of Subasio, which dominates the city, takes on a hue of flaming red and looks like a mass of molten metal. At such times the aspect of the glittering city suggests a far-off paradise, dim and inaccessible.

Upon arrival, these glowing fancies disappear. Over all breathes an air of quiet restraint and antique repose. In the long streets that traverse the hill-side one above another, connected by narrow alleys or steep flights of stone stairs, the footsteps of the infrequent passer-by awake loud echoes in the silence. The loudest sounds are the noise of the carriages bearing the " visitors " away, as they clatter down the steep descent from the Fonte Marcella to the Porta San Francesco. In the grass-grown square, opposite the Upper Church of the Saint, a few groups of boys are playing. Along the Via Superba (otherwise called the Via Principe di Napoli) no one is to be seen looking out of the square windows of the sixteenth-century palaces, whose austere lines, bare of any surface decoration, are hardly distinguishable from the mediæval city that surrounds

them. The only sounds come from higher up, in the Great Square, in the shadow of the City Tower or of the elegant, still perfect, Roman columns of the temple of Minerva: by the time the Porta Santa Chiara is passed, all is once more silent.

Built, as the city is, on terraces, there is an unimpeded view from almost every house; the frequent open spaces and platforms tempt the traveller to stop and look; the very alleyways with which the valley slopes are seamed are each and all a kind of telescope. Everything conspires – nay, even forces us, with the kindly complicity of the noiseless city, to look at the landscape; and, looking, we soon fall into an ecstatic contemplation. Before us lies a wide-spreading, pale-green plain, fading far away into the blue hollows of the mountains and the clear azure of the sky. On the left, from the last green slopes of Subasio and the hill over against Montefalco, the plain is engulfed and lost beyond Foligno, like an arm of the sea; indeed, the similarity is even more marked by reason of the constant mists that float above it. On the right, beyond the hills of Perugia, extends the line of heights round Trasimene, reaching away into the distance; and if we turn our gaze more towards the west, we can discern far, far away the blue heights of Cetona and Amiata. Immediately opposite is the line of eminences from Bettona to Montefalco (the north-eastern section of the ridge dividing the Spoleto and the Tiber valleys), behind which rise the rounded slopes of the mountains towards Collazzone, and, loftier still and growing dim in the distance, the Martani mountains. This range

is the dominant note in the view from Assisi. Of moderate height and stretching far along the horizon, they seem at first sight remarkable for their regularity and their horizontal lines, so characteristically Umbrian; not a splash of colour enlivens their grey-blue masses. But over their innumerable soft curves, light from a sky that for them is softly veiled penetrates and wraps them round, creating exquisite faint contrasts of lights and shades that melt into the prevailing tones of the landscape. These are subdued and luminous, delicate but quite definite, and full of a grave sweetness and quiet strength. Colours and lines blend without being lost into a slow but continuous oscillation of light and shade; and all are mingled together, and with the spirit that watches over them, in a mystical union.

From time to time, on a fine evening of autumn, when the sun is going down, but still warm, as one is sunk in contemplation of the landscape, there falls upon the ear the slow, solemn reverberation of the bell of San Francesco; it is quite near at hand, yet the sound seems to come from a mysterious distance, direct from heaven. Sound and sight, both together, prevail over the spirit and carry it away: we see and hear no longer; time is annihilated and a moment is a century. In that moment Assisi is the anteroom of paradise.

CHAPTER TWO

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ITALY OF THE COMMUNES

IN THE TIME OF ST. FRANCIS THE LANDSCAPE OF ASSISI was the same as it is today, except that certain areas which are now open fields were covered with woods. Moreover, the construction and appearance of the city are unchanged: a considerable number of the houses, and, it may be added, of the stones of which they are built, are identical.

And yet, at the end of the twelfth century, Assisi was not so solitary and silent as it is today. The plain of the Po had imparted a stir of vitality to the hills and mountains of the Tiber and the Arno, which at last reached the slopes of Subasio. Out of the scattered isolation of the courts and castles, buried under the intermittent internationalism of the Empire, or the more effective internationalism of the Church, like tufts of herbage in a vast marsh, during the eleventh century a people had been born; and in the twelfth century it was celebrating its youth, and undertaking, with confident courage, the administration of its own affairs. It was a people of a hundred diverse, yet related, townships, enemies yet sisters. Notwithstanding the variety of dialects, they all spoke one language; their institutions were identical – consuls at the head, supported by the council of citizens, and, beneath them all, the popular assembly. They were inspired by a spirit of generous life

and joyous activity, engaged in the conquest of the external world with all the freshness of youthful ardour. Idleness and fear, renunciation, and the disorder of barbarism – all this they had put behind them. Dress grew more elaborate; the richest eloquence and the most subtle reasoning burst spontaneously from the lips of the people; and they began to seek after what was decorative and beautiful and look beyond the mere needs of their daily life. Individual initiative was much in evidence: thus men felt and asserted their own ability and freedom, outside, and in conflict with, the constraint of the hitherto dominant castes and the traditions of centuries. But, as in every healthy development of humanity, the individual found his own fulfilment, and the rationale and forms of his activity, in new and spontaneous associations; a fine and splendid communal life grew up in place of the old outworn framework of society. Nobles who had abandoned the wearisome pomp of the castle for the society of the town; cultivators who sought in the refuge of the walls freedom from feudal bondage; soldiers and men of the law grown rich and cunning in the administration of episcopal estates; artisans and merchants who found in urban society a field for fruitful and independent activity: all these diverse elements were combined and united in the commune. All shared in a social life in which the distinction of classes no longer gave rise to hostility, and in which a transference from one class to another was quite a common event. Community of interest was the bond that united them: but a sense of moral unity developed out of this bond, and a unanimous effort of will lay at the

foundation of their society. In this effort, joy and freedom, conquest and possession were combined with a serious moral purpose. Family life was solid and dignified; the spirit of life was decorous and gay, but not luxurious. Food was sparing and plain – the fire was lighted for every meal, and wine was not always drunk – and the furniture was simple. Husband and wife ate from the same plate. Gold and silver ornaments were hardly ever seen; furs were worn unlined; for their trousseaux women were content with one linen petticoat and one dress. Dowries were small, and, as yet, fortunes were small too. Decorum in dress, truth in conversation, the sanctity of oaths, and the sense of honour were highly prized. To live honourably and keep faith with one's friends were the principal human obligations, even to an Ezzelino. The intense economic activity taught the necessity for, and the value of, work; the newly acquired wealth was increased by indefatigable toil, thrifty sober lives, and the faithful fulfilment of contracts. The workshop united master and apprentices in their common labours and mutual interests, and in the prospect that every apprentice had of himself becoming head of an establishment. Public appointments were still looked on as service to the State, and at times it happened that men would refuse them as being beyond their capacities. The magistrates' first concern was the administration of justice, and, above all others, to the poor, the weak, and the orphans. As administrators of justice and representatives of the community, emperors and kings, bishops and consuls were held in honour by the citizens.

In the twelfth century the commune stood for the fusion of classes, the unity of the people; and though the middle class developed out of this fusion, and the then existing unity gave rise to future antagonisms, dissensions were almost exclusively external, and between one city and another. But these wars between the communes, spontaneous and inevitable, had little of the cruelty and violence with which they are so easily invested in the imagination of far-off observers like ourselves, who have grown up in the experience or the memories of great modern wars. They were indeed continual and complicated – every city was hemmed in by a circle of naturally hostile neighbours – but they were nothing like so bitter and so destructive. At times they went on for years, but they were really a series of battles and forays, in which the prisoners were more numerous than the killed, and quickly ransomed. Civil disorders, which became more and more frequent in the course of the century, like epidemics in the spring, were far more violent: men can hate their neighbours much more heartily than people at a distance whom they do not know. But the construction of the city itself, where the factions were crowded into palaces and towers that were veritable stone fortresses, did not lend itself to massacres: and the conclusion of the struggle was the banishment and departure of one of the parties, who found a welcome in the surrounding castles or in a neighbouring city, whence (at any rate in the earlier times) they soon obtained pardon and permission to return home. Peace, within and without, was as easily and as quickly made as war;

disorders were soon succeeded by reconciliation, which again gave place to further disorder, and to peace once more. When the citizens rushed to arms, either upon a sudden impulse or upon a supposed necessity, no one thought of war and strife as desirable in themselves; peace and amity were regarded as the true aims, and the conquerors sometimes ascribed their victory to having been, as they thought, less eager to spring to arms.

These struggles, mitigated as they were by all manner of personal and other influences, were entirely lacking in the venom of genuine hatred, such as is produced by a deep moral cleavage. Cities and parties fought over definite, limited, material interests, not as the result of conflicting ideals and opinions that develop into insuperable spiritual antagonism. Even while they were fighting, they never forgot they were neighbouring peoples, men of the same blood: all of them Italians, Christians, and human beings. Patriotism was not a fanatical religion; and the adherence to a party was not considered an authority to pronounce an infallible condemnation on the opposing side. The moral life of the time was not confined within the narrow limits of the faction or the city: the State and the pursuit of politics were natural human conditions, but they were not exclusive and tyrannical, and beyond them lay economic activities, family life, the arts, and religion. Men of Milan and Cremona, Florentines and Sienese, Guelphs and Ghibellines, made war on each other when, and for as long as, they thought it necessary and wished to do so; but first and last and always their beliefs and feelings were the

same. Religion and patriotism, knightly honour and domestic virtue, art and poetry – these were common values, conceived and acted on in mutual understanding. Italy of 1200, though infinitely divided in the material sense, constituted a profound moral unity.

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This moral unity emerged undamaged and strengthened from the great struggle against Barbarossa. On the day following the destruction of Milan, the cities which had overthrown her walls with such savage satisfaction understood that there was a point beyond which these family feuds could not and must not go. Milan rose again by the labours of its destroyers; both sides conquered at Legnano. The struggle with the Empire had been dignified and noble because its motives had been clear and unmixed: the cities had defended their autonomy, while continuing to recognize the supremacy of the imperial authority; and the Treaty of Constance had represented the exact fulfilment of the moderate program with which they had entered upon the war. But the victory gave rise to a dangerous situation, which was to be accentuated by the decadence of the Empire and the development of the communes. This haughty imperial power began to become, through the very influence of its own individual adherents, a formal principle with no real content, a weapon to be used in private disputes rather than a supreme and ultimate authority. The well-defined issue against Barbarossa was succeeded by the diplomacies of various groups of interests, and

concealed hostilities. Men began to do lip-service to a principle which they betrayed and defeated in their acts and denied and despised in their hearts. And the communes remained in an inconclusive condition, neither vassals nor wholly independent.

But at that time these evils were still buried in the distant future. A more immediate difficulty, and one more intrinsically serious, was the relation of the communes to the Church, which had greatly changed since the end of the eleventh century. At that time the connexion between clergy and laity was constant and intimate. The clergy took a considerable part in municipal affairs; moreover, the bishop, whether or not he had the official title and jurisdiction of count, was the chief citizen, and the commune was born in the shadow of the cathedral and the episcopal palace. The people took the most intense interest in the affairs of its church; the nomination of the bishop took place in its presence, and its approval was something more than a simple formality. During the struggle of Gregory VII, and his predecessors and successors, for the reform of the clergy and against the lay investiture of prelates, municipal and ecclesiastical activities had become largely identified. On the one side were the high dignitaries of the Church, distinguished for their tyranny, simony, and evil living, and the great feudal lords; on the other the people – a people which was not yet a class, but a blend and fusion of all the classes from the urban noble to the artisan – struggling at once for its own enfranchisement and for the moral and religious purification of the Church. At its side

was the mass of inferior, parochial clergy, also oppressed by their superiors, discontented and shocked, backed and controlled by the encouragement and commands of the orthodox prelates and of the legates from Rome. The papal thunderbolts against simoniacal and immoral priests were, by the will of Rome, hurled by the people. The faithful were to boycott the services of the guilty clergy and refuse obedience to the bishops and abbots, in matters both spiritual and temporal. The people did so and became accustomed to governing themselves: free people and orthodox clergy worked together.

When the struggle over the investiture question had come to an end, especially in Italy, with a victory for ecclesiastical liberty and for the papal claims; when concubinage had been suppressed, or at least when the connivance and support of the imperial power and the great feudal lords in this matter had been terminated; the Church no longer thought it necessary or found it convenient to appeal to the people. With the liberation of the clergy from secular duties, clerical life drew apart from secular life; and the separation continued to become more clearly marked until it ended in isolation. The local clergy managed their own affairs in their own way; and it sometimes happened that they became completely alienated from the life of the city, so much so as to deny any connexion with it. When Tortona was besieged by Barbarossa, they came out of the city and implored the Emperor not to confuse them with the rebel populace. At Roncaglia the Archbishop of Milan had addressed a hymn

to the absolute imperial power, contrasting it with the multitude of tyrants (the communes, of course, and their rulers) who proscribed the rich and subverted both lay and priestly offices by their iniquitous laws. In many cities of the Lombard League the bishops held their sees from the Emperor. On the other hand, the influence of the Roman curia made itself increasingly felt on the weak clergy. By the agency of the legates, who were growing more numerous and more active, Rome exercised a control on episcopal life, and pronounced the decisive word in the controversies over the election of the bishops and in other important questions affecting the city churches. And the central power of the Roman curia not only no longer sought lay intervention, but was jealously anxious to withdraw ecclesiastical affairs altogether from lay influences. From the end of the twelfth century onwards the struggle for ecclesiastical liberty is energetic and continual. The Church, redeemed by the blood of Christ, owes no external obedience, proclaimed Innocent III; and its entire life and activity must be withdrawn from the control of the lay power. Not merely has the latter no right to interfere in the elections of prelates or in the administration of the property of the Church, but it ought not to claim that clergy and clerical cases should be brought before secular tribunals, or to levy taxes on ecclesiastical property, which is sacred. Whoever misappropriated it, or claimed control over it, or tried to lay any charges upon it, is included in the condemnation applying to heretics who challenge religious authority and the dogmas of the Catholic faith.

But the communes had been established with the express intention of subjecting all citizens to the same laws and the same burdens; or, to be more precise, this was not a prearranged program, a definite scheme of civil government ready to be put into operation, but the actual life of the communes in its origin and development. Among the citizens, especially at the beginning, were a large number of people who were in enjoyment of Church property, on various sorts of tenure, feudal, leasehold, or emphyteutic, and other kinds of feudal property, and they had aimed at transforming their tenure into definitely independent ownership and had, in fact, succeeded in doing so. They were only too ready to include clerical tithes with all the other feudal burdens – at least they treated them in the same way. It was the fertile, wicked land of Lombardy, as Innocent III lamented, which offered to the Church bitter wild raisins instead of sweet grapes, and the malodorous and deadly poppy instead of fragrant roses.

Later on, when there was any dispute between the Pope and the Emperor, or when there was more than one claimant to the imperial throne, the cities that were vassals of the Empire, or of the imperial candidate not approved by the Pope, came into conflict with the Roman Church. On the other hand there were the cities of the Patrimony of St. Peter, who found themselves in the same relation to the Pope as the other communes to the Emperor, and in the same way supported him in his disputes, with this difference – that obedience to ecclesiastical authority was widely

held to be less creditable than obedience to kings and emperors.

Now, a conflict with ecclesiastical authority and with its supreme embodiment, the Papacy, brought with it a moral disorder, a laceration of the spirit, which were fortunately absent from the internal and external struggles of the communes. They became conflicts of principles and might develop into cases of conscience. The Church countered the political hostility of the communes with religious condemnation, and replied to their legal, economic, and military measures with the ecclesiastical weapons of excommunication and interdict. The deprivation of sacraments and religious rites bore hardly on faithful consciences, and saddened and impoverished social life. But as they became more numerous and frequent, even ecclesiastical weapons began to be less effective, though they were never quite disregarded. They were never laughed at, or, if they were, the laughter was somewhat constrained. Nor, on the other hand, were they endured with complete resignation and with the obedience springing from profound conviction. Pressure was brought to bear on the local clergy because they did not observe the interdict; and the priest found himself caught between the anvil of conflict with the civil power and an angry populace, and the hammer of the papal injunctions. From time to time the consuls and the *podestà* would take measures of reprisal and forbade the citizens to enter into any relations with the bishop or the priests, and declared a social and economic boycott in reply to the ecclesiastical ban.

The subjects in dispute were questions of principle: the limits of the civil and the religious power, the distinction, within the Church, between the spiritual and the temporal, between heavenly endowments and earthly interests. The property of the clergy, and ecclesiastical rights, which gave rise to the quarrels, were felt to be an obstacle and a stumbling-block. Bitter sarcasms about the earthly ties and worldly habits of the clergy were common everywhere; satirical epigrams, sometimes bordering on grossness, against the avarice and cupidity of the curia were very popular. Jests were made on the names of Pope Lucius III, comparing him to his namesake the fish: "one hunts his fellow fish, the other devours his fellow men." It was said in Rome that the Deity was not *Trino* (triune) but *Quattrino* (farthing). And finally recourse was had to the ultimate arguments, to the gospel records and sayings: "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's," the taxes which Christ made Peter pay, the poverty of Jesus and the Apostles. But they were conscious of a feeling of insecurity: laymen felt that they were venturing upon unknown ground.

Even the lower orders, those without property, who should not have had any grounds for taking part in the struggle between the two rich and powerful groups, felt a deeper resentment against the clergy. Poverty aroused more potent feelings of envy and rancour when they saw such abundance enjoyed by followers of Him who had not so much as a pillow on which to lay His head. It was worse when the great possessions and luxurious habits of the clergy were aggravated by their scandalous lives.

Concubinage was not eradicated, although the harem with which the Archbishop Christiano of Magonza surrounded himself when fighting in the last years of his life for Alexander III (it was said of him that his behaviour was that of a tyrant rather than a priest) remained an exception. Clergy could be met with going about in secular dress, with long hair, or plying the trades of conjurors and money-lenders; and fugitive monks, with some of the monastery funds to support them at the courts of princes. It was not only the secular poppies of Lombardy that gave out so unpleasant an odour; the nostrils of Innocent III were assailed by similar exhalations from a great abbey like that of Montecassino.

In this clash of interests and chaos of opinions heretical propaganda flourished exceedingly. The opposition to the material possessions and political power of the clergy, and the tendency to make the efficacy of the sacraments depend on the virtue of the priests were used as a theory and principle of controversy by Arnold of Brescia, who was finally hanged and burnt by Barbarossa at the instance of Pope Hadrian IV. But his followers remained; and behind them heretics of still more ancient origin, the Cathari or Paterini; and more recently the Waldensians. They varied in their beliefs, and in the extent of their estrangement from Roman Catholic orthodoxy, but all were in agreement in their attacks on the corruption and material wealth of the clergy, in such glaring contrast to the poverty enjoined by the Gospels. Since the time when the Roman Church had begun to accumulate possessions (so the Wal-

densians and the Cathari vied with each other in pointing out), she had ceased to be the true Church. Pope Sylvester, he of the famous Donation of Constantine, was the Antichrist; through him and after him the Roman Church had become the scarlet woman of the Apocalypse. The anti-clerical and anti-papal insinuations also found wide acceptance among those who did not accept the sacramental powers of the Waldensian "*perfetti*," or the Catharite dogma of the Devil as creator of the world. An orthodox Catholic and learned theologian, Dante Alighieri, a century later, was to call down curses on the Donation of Constantine, which had done so much harm, and remind the simoniacal popes of the simile of the prostitute who fornicated with kings.

The religious orders of the times did not help to bridge the distance between clergy and laymen, or to dispute the prevailing hostility. They, too, had great possessions, although it was even more true in the case of the monastics than of the secular clergy that their estates gave but scanty returns and were largely of nominal value. The fact, also, that they were in common ownership and not the property of individual clergy did not make much impression on the mind of the multitude; and it made no difference at all to the conflict of interests between clergy and laity, whether as private individuals or communes. Greater austerity of life (in many cases, though not in all), more ardent faith, a vocation expressed with more fervour and sincerity, were observable in the more recently established communities. But the common people, especially in the

cities, had little opportunity of noticing this. The monks lived in monasteries, which were for the most part in the country, and especially in solitary places. There were monks who performed pastoral duties and had their own parishes, but that was not common, especially in Italy. The Premonstratensian order, founded by Norbert of Xanten in the last twenty years of the twelfth century, was dedicated to such service; but it had not spread widely, and not at all in Italy. And, in any event, the parishes in their charge were rural parishes. The cities, which were at that time of most importance, were completely outside the influence of the monks. Moreover, the people venerated the monk when he observed his rule, begged for his intercession, and, if he had a reputation for sanctity, expected to see him work miracles; but they did not look upon him as a man and a brother. The religious orders were something like an aristocracy; more so, in some ways, than the secular clergy. The latter, the ordinary priests, were near to the people, they were themselves men of the people; but, in this instance, they were too near and too like them. There were priests who would make bets as to who could drink the most, were not ashamed to crack jokes with sacristans and peasants, and left off their clerical garb as they pleased. Such clergy could not but lack prestige.

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As a matter of fact, the wealth of the clergy (whether secular or regular) was not greater at the beginning of the thirteenth century than in previous ages: indeed, having regard

to the dissolution of the feudal regime and the transformation of wealth from material possessions into money, it was less. But the charitable activities associated in the past with the resources of the clergy and their temporal power had been modified and had largely disappeared. Towards the end of the ancient civilization the Church (whether represented by bishops or monasteries) had protected, housed, and provided for weak and helpless persons and abandoned children. This work had fitted perfectly into the new feudal organization, itself founded on the same protection of the inferiors by their superiors and the consequent subjection of the former. Now the children had grown up and the weak had become strong. Protection was followed by liberty, and charity by work. They resented the bond of services no longer required or even accepted. The temporal possessions of the clergy and the exalted power of the Church had been defended and proclaimed at that very time by the Roman curia in the most sweeping terms and with the most solemn conviction. But the voice of the priest and the monk did not reach men's hearts with the certainty and force of former days.

The isolation of the clerical caste and hierarchy, the conflict of interests, and the clash of powers became deeper and more serious because they had given rise to a kind of moral misunderstanding. It was not a question of creed or dogma: the people were content to believe what the Church taught, professing it when they could understand it, and, for the rest, accepting it with "implicit faith," as the theologians say. Even less was it a matter of rites and

ceremonies: never had any society been so deeply attached to great cathedrals and solemn processions as were the communes. It was the attitude of mind that had changed, both in the pastors and their flock. As in former days, the people found in the priest the minister of a rite, the dispenser of the sacraments; heretical propaganda had not made any very considerable breach in these beliefs. But they were now less ready to find him the interpreter of their own feelings, the confidant of their doubts, their intimate adviser, and their moral guide.

From the tenth to the thirteenth century the human spirit, among laymen, had undergone great changes. The earth no longer appeared as a vale of tears and nothing more; it was no longer always thought necessary to look beyond it for comfort and contentment. The joy of living had been reborn and was growing; the pleasures of activity began to be understood. Labourers cultivating a patch of ground now no longer under feudal domination; merchants travelling from one part of Europe to another to buy stuffs and sell them at a great profit; soldiers setting forth on an expedition (which often resolved itself into a rather lucrative raid over the country-side) against the neighbouring city – all these found their occupations more pleasant than formerly and made more profit out of them; and pleasure and profit were of mutual assistance. They believed in God as firmly as in the previous centuries, but they found Him nearer to them in their lives and daily activities. They prayed as often as before, in more beautiful churches and with more sumptuous ceremonial; they invoked and adored

the Virgin and the saints; but they looked upon Jesus, the Virgin, and the saints rather as helpers and companions in their own work and their own joy than as saviours of the world and of human life; and they found in their churches, not a refuge from human life, but a continuation and exaltation of it. Men no longer bowed their heads, in dull resignation, beneath difficulties, sorrows, and injuries; they sought to manage their lives in accordance with the saying: "Help yourself and God will help you." Religious faith became moral, and life practical: beside the monkish virtues of humility and penitence the lay virtues of prudence, courage, and justice, beneficent powers presiding over the city and over human life, took an honoured place.

This new moral life owed its creation and development to a healthy, vigorous, and spontaneous instinct among the laity; but the solid foundation of a clear and general comprehension of the position was still lacking. The relation of the activities and feelings of this time with the accepted systems and the traditional faith had to be realized and defined; but this blending of faith and morals, of ceremony and practical life, was beyond the understanding of the professional priesthood at the end of the century, and indeed they made no attempt to grasp it. The lower orders of the priesthood were without knowledge or authority, at the mercy of the secular owners of most of the parish churches, and even on occasions oppressed by their bishops. Discontent was rife among them, and they would even lend an ear to anticlerical agitation. The higher ranks of the clergy were absorbed in the vast and complicated administration

of the Church lands, in the disputes between the bishops and the chapters (in which individual canons had divided their respective endowments into prebendaries, allowing the "canonical life" to fall into disuse), between regular and secular clergy, ecclesiastical and lay jurisdiction. Their pastoral work was necessarily meagre; their artificial and conventional sermons belonged in spirit and in form to the depths of the Middle Ages and had grown stale and inadequate. They had not got beyond the frozen transcendence of the Byzantine Christ, the rejection of a world under the domination of the Devil. In these sermons the living fatherhood of God and the warm humanity of Jesus found no place; the joyous confidence of the younger generations met with no response or satisfaction. And beneath all the conventional systems and outworn formulas what remained living and permanent in Christian morals became less effective as an influence on the moral conduct of the clergy. References to the physician's need of healing, and to the mote and beam, were constantly on men's lips. Pope Innocent said that the sins of the people sprang from the sins of their pastors.

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In the twelfth century it was art that interpreted the life and expressed the moral consciousness of the youthful Italian people. Romanesque art was doubly religious, both in spirit and in content; but at the same time it was profoundly human and social. The cathedrals rose, with the development of the communes, created by the people for the people; their

erection and consecration were the work, the glory, and the delight of the whole body of citizens. The community of the faithful gathered in the church to pray; there the council of the people deliberated and the magistrates of the commune were sworn in. They went into the cathedral to pray before they began a war with a neighbouring city, and they returned to it to give thanks to God and the Madonna for victory. And the edifice erected by the architect for the faith and life of the people was embellished by the sculptor with representations that spoke to their imagination and appealed to their feelings. In works of art the solemn faith of days gone by and the new active life of the present came into touch once more. The impassive idols of the Byzantine mosaics, judging and triumphing over humanity from their infinite altitudes, give place to a Christ who with a truly human affection puts His arm round the Virgin Mother. Instead of dreadful visions of the last judgment and of hell, the people looked for stories of the life of Jesus and the Madonna, and the sculptor duly modelled them on the façades of the cathedrals or round the walls of baptisteries. The persons were divine, but the stories were human; and these were accompanied by incidents in the lives of the titular saint, one who had lived and suffered among, and for, humanity. And representation of the life of every day invaded the sacred places likewise; the procession of the months, so often carved inside cathedral doors, the seed-time of October, the June harvest, the September vintage, and the chase in May, as if to signify the connexion and continuity of life sacred and profane, of the world and

God. And sometimes the representations of daily life even penetrate to the inmost parts of the shrine; we find the humblest artisans depicted on the capitals of the pillars, the cobbler hammering at his last, and the wheelwright turning his wheel.

In these representations there is nothing unsuitable or profane. They arose from a true simplicity of mind and deep seriousness. Christ's humanity was made manifest to sight and touch because men drew help and comfort from such a representation. The forms and incidents of daily life were portrayed at the doorway of the church, and inside, because the citizens were conscious of its moral value (expressed in representations of civil virtues, beginning with the reign of justice) and they wished to emphasize and elevate it by the sanction of religion. Romanesque art, by once more creating with the most exact and loving care figures in the round, the representation of vitality, the actions and passions of life, expressed and affirmed the humanity that it rediscovered, but at the same time portrayed and exalted the divinity in that humanity. Hardly one generation earlier than the Little Poor Brother of Assisi (he died after the Saint), Benedetto Antelami, the Michelangelo of young Italy, delivered a deeply religious message to the Italian people.

All his works display that precision of line that comes only from the intense observation and powerful expression of reality. But that reality is interpreted in terms of the spirit and is animated by an inner life, a life that is not wasted in pompous gestures, or exhausted by convulsive

movement; intense and concentrated and for that reason deeper and truer. Its prophets, self-possessed and silent, look within themselves, because there alone they find the word of God that they are to pass on to the people. The Angel of the Annunciation does not bow before Mary, obsequious and effeminate, as in the later and more refined art; in the austere, powerful beauty of his face may be read the moral grandeur of his task; his hand is raised at Mary in a gesture of grave and solemn command, and she receives the divine message with pious submission, without fear or affectation. In the " Flight into Egypt " there are no elaborate compositions or picturesque adventures; over all the human personages lies the burden of a fate to be obeyed in silence. But in the group representing Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (one of the highest achievements of art) the two motionless figures, immediately facing each other, represent, by the vivid expressions and the tense fervour of their attitudes, the whole moral drama of humanity which descries from afar, and awaits, its redemption.

The people that gave birth to the art of Benedetto Antelami was a people in whom thought and action, inner life and its outer manifestations, were susceptible of a marvellously fertile union; except that the fount of moral truth up to which the artist had climbed to refresh himself with a draught had, by a generous miracle, reached the plain, and expanded into perennial streams of pure and life-giving waters.

CHAPTER THREE

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YOUTH

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITIES AND THE COMMUNES in the valley of the Po had been much assisted by convenience of site and situation. The populations of central Italy were not so favoured, especially in the interior, where they were at some distance from the sea. Isolated, and for the most part in mountainous country, and with poor communications, the cities were smaller and more scattered. In this way the formation and emancipation of the communes had come about somewhat later.

In Umbria, Perugia was the most important city, and its municipality was more developed, elaborate, and influential. As early as 1130 consuls were in power, and the city held the surrounding country, as far as Trasimene, against the feudal nobles. Assisi, on the other hand, even twenty years later, was still without consuls and a genuine municipal government. And yet the city had awakened to active life a century before; under Gregory VII its reformist bishop had been compelled to die in exile at Fonte Avellana, in the monastery of San Pier Damiani, perhaps because the Assisans in the process of acquiring property and freedom attacked the papal bishop, as in other cities, for the same motive as induced them to revolt against the imperial hierarch. We do not find great nobles in the city or in the surrounding country, but a collection of small,

scattered feudalities. There were many monasteries; the largest of them was that of San Benedetto, now occupied by the Benedictines of Cluny, dominating the road from Assisi to Spello from the height of Subasio, two thousand feet above, and owning churches and chapels in the city and outside it. In 1160 Barbarossa proclaimed Assisi, in accordance with his intensified policy of that period, immediately subject to the Empire, exempt from any authority of count, duke, or bishop. In that same year clergy, nobles, and people combined to take an active and harmonious part in the public life of Assisi; and in the fifth decade of the century, in the upper city, near the simple and dignified house that was being prepared for the lodging of the consuls, the cathedral of Giovanni da Gubbio, dedicated to San Rufino, began to arise, with its austere façade, and its three doorways, and over them the three rose-windows and the triangular pediment. It is a Romanesque masterpiece of dignified simplicity and serene harmony; beside it stands a dark and lofty tower, with sharp, strong, rectangular lines.

The commune began to unfold itself; but fifteen years later the armies of Barbarossa himself came to nip it in the bud. In 1174 Cristiano di Magonza, the General-Archbishop, overran the Duchy of Spoleto before moving on to the siege of Ancona. Under his blue coat he wore a corslet of steel; he rode with a gilded helmet on his head and an ax in his hand, followed by his guards and his ladies. Sacked castles and ruined cities marked his passage. Terni was destroyed, Spoleto and Assisi occupied. The authority of the Empire made itself abruptly felt. On the

rocky height which dominates on one side Assisi and on the other the gloomy defile through which twists the Tescio in arid curves, a German garrison was posted. Barbarossa himself, a notable warrior and politician (twin scourge of the peoples), there abode for a time, and fell to issuing imperial edicts soon after the peace of Venice. He withdrew the district from the direct imperial jurisdiction and bestowed it upon Conrad of Urslingen, who called himself Duke of Spoleto and Count of Assisi. He married a lady from the Duchy of Nocera; in point of fact, he discovered some sort of affection for the place and did not attempt altogether to stifle its flourishing municipal life. But nevertheless the years following the conquest of the city by Cristiano represented a reversion to feudalism and a hindrance to its development as a commune.

The period of development which for Lombardy was the first twenty years after the turn of the century came in central Italy twenty years after the battle of Legnano. German imperialism, sustained spiritually by Italian doctors of Roman law, sought upon the Arno and the Tiber compensation for its discomfiture in the valley of the Po. The victorious and solid enfranchisement of the Lombard cities was balanced by Tuscany, the Duchy of Spoleto, and the March of Ancona, all in the firm grasp of the imperial power. Perugia preserved its communal organization tolerably intact; in Assisi the foreign domination remained secure for more than twenty years, and during that time St. Francis was born. Barbarossa was followed by Henry VI, who immensely increased his strength by the acquisition of

Naples and Sicily, thus consolidating his dominions in central Italy. In the autumn of 1196 he was in the valley of Spoleto; at Foligno he found his infant son Frederick, still in the cradle, in the charge of Conrad's mother, and he took the child with him towards Rome, to have him baptized near the city, with a vast concourse of bishops and cardinals. Through the Duchy there spread the dreadful rumor of the merciless measures of repression by which the Emperor, hardly more than twenty years old, but already the perfect model of the "pure politician," had put down opposition in the Kingdom of Naples. And the son of Barbarossa, more fortunate and more cruel than his father, dreamed already, under the pretext of a crusade, of the conquest of the East, and the reconstruction of the Roman Empire as it originally existed.

But in September, 1197, the haughty Cæsar died prematurely after a short illness. His faithful Germans mourned him who had led them to victory and filled them with booty in far-off lands, and had made the German name dreaded among his despoiled and beaten subjects. But throughout Italy there went up a cry of joy that the tyrant was dead; it was the *dies iræ* for German feudalism in central Italy. The cities rose with one accord; the communes that had seemed extinct proved more alive than ever. Philip of Swabia, Henry's brother, who had two years previously besieged Perugia, but had finished by confirming the city in certain privileges conferred upon it by Henry VI, substantially favourable to its liberties, fled hurriedly, and in peril of his life, from his dukedom of Tuscany to Germany.

Behind him the Tuscan League combined the cities from Florence to Perugia in defence of the liberties that they had recovered and enlarged. Marquado, Marquis of Ancona, went to seek his fortunes in the Kingdom of Naples. Duke Conrad entered into negotiations with the Pope (January, 1198), no longer the aged Celestine, but Innocent III, only thirty-eight years old.

The Pope intended to exercise in all its fullness the ancient authority of the Church over the whole Christian world; and to do so he understood the necessity of a territorial foundation. His chief concern was accordingly to secure the direct control of the Church over as wide an area as possible. He began by exacting an oath of fealty from the prefect of Rome, and abolished from that office all that remained of the authority of the Roman Emperor. His next undertaking was to reëstablish a firmer hold over the Patrimony of Peter, from Radicofani to Ceprano, and also in those parts of Tuscany where Henry and Philip had set up independent centres of authority, and bring the Duchy and the March under the full sovereignty of the See of Peter, in accordance with the Donation of Charlemagne. To the cities that had risen against their German feudal lords Pope Innocent sent letters of praise and encouragement: the German was the enemy and oppressor of Italy, the sacred seat of Papacy and Empire. Happy were those who withdrew from the dominion of barbarism and came of their own accord within the fold of the Roman Church. The Pontiff repeated on every possible occasion, applying Jesus' words about His own law to the Papal Government,

that the yoke of the Church was easy and its burden light.

The cities came in on their own account. Perugia made a formal treaty with the Pointiff – on the same terms as its treaties with the Empire – which afforded the city protection, subject to the widest safeguards for its communal organization. The Tuscan League, when the Pope assured it that Tuscany belonged to the papal dominions, did not pay much attention to the statement; but later on they gave a sort of general and nominal adhesion to the papal claims. But there were complaints over the Pope's treaties with Conrad of Spoleto; it was hinted that he was not averse from supporting German feudalism, and the Pope's loyalty and good faith were rather bitterly called in question.

Innocent had, in fact, been disposed to accept Conrad's offer of vassalage; but at that time such an arrangement would have been both unprofitable and scandalous in the eyes of the communities that had already won their freedom. There was nothing left for Conrad but to surrender, and resign himself to the loss of the citadel of Assisi, that most precious instrument of tyranny, which the armed populace had taken and destroyed on their own account. When Conrad had gone, Innocent made a tour through the Duchy: he visited Spoleto, Perugia, and Todi, consecrating cathedrals and altars; and he left the Cardinal of Santa Maria in Aquiro as Governor of the Duchy of Spoleto and the County of Assisi. He did not go to Assisi. He contented himself with urging upon it, as upon the other cities of the Duchy, obedience and respect to the Cardinal,

in whose person spiritual and temporal power were so happily conjoined.

Between the Empire and the Papacy the people were able to assert their own liberty. Under the guidance of their consuls, who were then established in Assisi, they made provision for the restoration of their walls in the following year, to protect themselves against powerful states at a distance and feudal nobles near at hand. To these latter the recovery of the communes had meant the loss of their palaces in the cities, the surrender of their estates and the dismantling of their castles in the surrounding country. The heavy arm of the people reached as far as Nocera: even Assisi had its policy of expansion.

Perugia lay almost at the gates of Assisi; it was a powerful commune and in the full vigour of imperialistic enthusiasm. By force of arms and by the conclusion of treaties it steadily extended its authority or its influence over a great part of Umbria. In those years it had turned the vast and fertile valley of Chiana, as far as beyond Trasimene, into its granary; and Castiglione del Lago (or "Chiugino," as it was then called) had been ruined and destroyed. For some time the Perugians had begun to plant colonies in various districts, melancholy memories of classical times, seething with oppression and disorder. An aggrandizement of Assisi would not be agreeable to Perugia; an inarticulate feeling of enmity had begun to grow up between the two peoples, and the expansion of Assisi in the direction of Nocera was a hand stretched out to Gubbio, which Perugia was anxious to keep in subjection. The de-

spoiled feudal lords of the Assisan country climbed the hill of Perugia in search of protection, and found it. Perugia had uprooted feudalism earlier and more effectively than Assisi; but this was a matter of external politics, which, as is well known, must not be affected by home affairs. Perugia welcomed the fugitives with open arms, admitted them to citizenship, and received Nocera into alliance and submission: war was finally declared. But in Assisi matters were far from peaceful. In addition to the struggles between citizens and feudal nobles, which were always a symptom of the parturition of the communes, disorder began to be aggravated by the cleavage between the upper and lower classes among the citizens – nobles and commons; or, as the phrase went in Assisi, between "the good people" and "the people." Moreover, there was probably some dissatisfaction with the Bishop, who at that time was in the habit of complaining to the Pope that certain persons tried to elude his fulminations, alleging that they had been absolved in Rome.

From the heights on which the two cities stood, the warriors came down into the plain of the Tiber; the encounter took place near the Ponte San Giovanni, at the meeting of the roads and the crossing of the river: to be more exact, at Collestrada, southwest of the bridge, on the southern slopes of the long, low hill of Brufa, wedged in between Tiber and Chiascio, and dominating the two valleys. The Perugian forces were already, of course, superior in numbers, and became increasingly so with the influx of the feudal nobles from the Assisan country and the fugitives from the

internal disorders of the city. So the people of Assisi had the worst of it. Among the prisoners who fell into the hands of the victorious Perugians was Francesco di Pietro di Bernardoni, who was then twenty years of age.

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Francesco di Pietro Bernardoni, who fought at Collestrada on the side of the people of Assisi against Perugia and the nobles, belonged to that solid bourgeoisie which began to be the salient social influence in the communes. According to the standards of today their wealth would be a matter of no great importance, because the scope of commerce was small and the merchants were more numerous than their transactions. But wealth is always a relative term: and for a small city of those days Pietro was rich. He sold cloth and carried on a wholesale trade, even crossing the Alps to buy at the great French markets, which were attended by traders from all countries. He had swollen the profits from his business by lending money at interest, a proceeding which, as we shall see later, was not unknown to his descendants. He was industrious, greedy, and harsh, and his wealth was largely the result of his own force of character: the fortune of a *nouveau riche*. The entire family took part in the business. The mother was of noble family, because she is described as " Signora " in contemporary documents; very probably her marriage had been the union of an ancient but impoverished house with the new wealth of the bourgeoisie. She was an exquisite feminine character, virtuous, reserved, affectionate, apt to slip

away into the world of dreams and able to endure with resignation the hard realities of daily life. In this way Pietro Bernardoni's coarse, cold blood was blended with a finer temperament, full of the promise of sensibility and imagination.

Born during one of his father's business journeys, the boy was baptized by his mother by the name of Giovanni; but his father preferred to call him Francis. The name was, at that time, uncommon and had undoubtedly been suggested to the merchant by his journeys across the mountains. In his choice one may detect the snobbishness of one who has made his fortune and wishes to distinguish his children from those of poorer men.

Pietro Bernardoni's house, on the present site of the Chiesa Nuova, was in the midst of a network of alleys, even today inaccessible to carts and carriages. Near by stood the most conspicuous relic of Roman Assisi, the beautiful Corinthian columns of fluted marble which had formed the porch of the temple of Minerva. The Piazza Maggiore did not then exist: the centre of the Commune was higher up, at San Rufino. Near Pietro's house was the Church of San Giorgio, where are today Santa Chiara and the Convent of the Clarisse. The priest there kept a school to which Francis was sent; and on the open space in front of it, whence there is one of the loveliest and most perfect views in all Assisi, as the boy came out of his scholastic prison, he must often have stayed to play, and perhaps to look about him. The love of nature, so marked a characteristic of Francis in his later years, must have been in him

from his earliest youth; and it must have been stronger than his love of study. Francis was but a moderate scholar; he picked up some Latin, which, in the elementary school of those times, was what Italian is today as against the local dialects; and of course he also learned to write, but tolerably badly – perhaps his lively character could not adapt itself to the laborious task of forming letters properly. When Francis was already celebrated, and head of a great religious Order, he preferred to use the sign of the cross as his signature.

It is not certain whether Francis, or Giovanni – for a time both names were used indifferently – learnt French at San Giorgio; it was a language in which, in his later years of holiness, he loved to sing and unburden his soul, though he never succeeded in speaking it really well. It was a fairly rich language, compared with the spoken Italian which had hardly stammered into existence, and came next in importance after Latin. He might have learnt some from his father, who had acquired a smattering of it on his journeys; or perhaps, like him, he acquired it on the spot, when he accompanied him to France. What in Pietro Bernardoni remained a matter of practical use to him as a merchant, became a study and labour of love and a means of lyrical expression in his more imaginative son.

Even without these journeys the young Francesco's world, both as a boy and as a youth, was far from a narrow one. Assisi was a small commune, and in Pietro's house the atmosphere was that of a bourgeois family, taken up with the business and the cares of a household. But in the society

of those days the manners and customs of the different classes were more on a level. There was a wide interchange of news and opinions, of facts and feelings, both among individuals and between city and city, and nation and nation: they were all united in a common European and Christian civilization. The merchants travelled from country to country, and met together at great fairs in far-off lands: on their goings and comings, they spread their news abroad and brought back with them what they had heard. In his corner of Umbria, echoes reached Francis of Christ's sepulchre fallen into the hands of the infidel, and of the great Emperor, who, in old age, had been moved to go and free it from this yoke, but had been struck down on the way, almost treacherously, by death – or, as some priest would urge, as a late but just retribution for the evil he had done to the Church: and especially for having shed blood in the basilica of St. Peter and set it on fire. There would be stories about the youthful tyrant who, far away in his Kingdom of Naples, slew and martyred the faithful while his soldiers ravaged the highways of the Duchy, and about Duke Conrad, who held the Assisans in subjection from the heights of the citadel; and there was curiosity about the royal and imperial infant, in charge of the Duchess near by at Foligno. There would also be news of another sort. It was related that a merchant, like Pietro Bernardoni, also called Peter, had given up all his wealth in France, and was going about the world preaching the Gospel. He had made disciples and they had spread over Lombardy; but they preached without the Bishop's permission, and were

excommunicate and heretical. Pietro Bernardoni, in the course of his travels, must have met with Waldensians on both sides of the Alps; and he must have described them as madmen, though perhaps taking a pleasure in recounting some of their characteristics to the disfavour of the rich and worldly clergy that he knew. But not all were of the same mind in those parts. News was brought, more direct and from nearer at hand, of other heretics and wild men, with a farrago of signs and portents, from Modena, Prato, Florence, Viterbo, and Orvieto. This last city had been in peril of falling into the hands of the Paterini, who rejected the Church and her sacraments, and said that the world was the work of the Devil. It is well known how a Roman noble, who had been appointed *podestà*, overcame them by the help of the prisoners and outlaws of the district, with the encouragement of Pope Innocent. But the heretics had revenged themselves, for they seized and murdered him. Devout persons came to visit his tomb from far off, and many miracles were accomplished there.

News of all kinds from near and far fed Francis' imagination in his boyhood and in his youth, but he could find inspiration too in what went on under his own eyes. He watched Cæsar's mighty army winding over the plain, marching, in the pride of its success, upon Rome and the Kingdom of Naples. On the other side the citizens rose in arms against their German overlord; and he himself must have borne a hand, more in jest than for patriotism, in the dismantling of the citadel, which he had hitherto contemplated with awe from afar. Stories heard at random, mar-

vellous and terrifying, strange and splendid sights, intensified his natural inclinations, which were not at all those of the bourgeois and commercial world in which his daily life was passed: for his tastes lay in the direction of refinement and splendour, fantasy and adventure. He had a particular devotion for the legends of the paladins of Charlemagne and the knights of the Round Table; and he dreamed of exploits and fame for himself upon their model. These tastes of his did not pass unnoticed by the friends of the family, who naturally treated them as youthful follies. His mother, Pica, who had a secret preference for Francis over his brother Angelo (perhaps because she felt he was more like herself), viewed the matter differently. She would often speculate on the future, and sometimes betrayed her maternal solicitudes to the others. "That son of mine," she would say, " you will see him grow into a worthy son of the Lord."

At that time, this " son of the Lord " loved the world and all the joys of life. His taste for display showed itself in his elegant dress, in his liking for parties of pleasure with the young men of his age, and in his lavish expenditure on feasting and pastimes of all kinds; and sometimes he would leave his parents alone at table in order to go out on some roistering expedition with his companions. In the youthful ardour of the young commonwealth, life was then gayer and more decorative than it is today, though possibly not so luxurious or so refined. Among his fellow-citizens of his own age, Francis was noted for his ever open and well-filled purse and the large magnificence of his generous

and extravagant ways. Compared with his father, a parsimonious accumulator of money, Francis represented the gay and careless generation to come; not that he did not play his part in the family business with all the family ability. He worked and amused himself by turns: the revelry of the evenings and the nights made up for his daily probation. His father did not interfere because he, too, had a weakness for Francis, and his avarice was overcome by his ambition to see his son courted and flattered and carry himself with all the airs of an aristocrat.

So the years of Francis' early youth were passed in riotous gaiety. None but a pedantic moralist would waste time in trying to investigate these proceedings, in trying to discover how far Francis was "led astray." Francis was a man of sense, and is not to be regarded as having been "led astray": he was simply a very young man who wished to enjoy his youth and his wealth to the full. Other young men of his class did likewise, and, like Pietro, their fathers did not interfere. Moreover, Francis had that ambition to excel which made him take the first place even in these youthful celebrations.

In Italy at that time the distinctions between bourgeoisie and nobility were not very definite. As early as the time of Barbarossa, strangers were scandalized to observe that in Italy the tradesmen were allowed to wear the military belt, the insignia of nobility, and they were compelled to add that these promotions from the lower orders made the Italian cities particularly prosperous. Francis, young, rich, and proud, may well have thought that he might easily

become one of these ennobled plebeians. And in the meantime the war with Perugia and the exiles gave him an opportunity to prove his mettle as a soldier.

The diversions of youth have never been regarded as inconsistent with the profession of arms. To this gay and chivalrous youth the campaign must have seemed like a new and delightful experience. He was hardly twenty years old and perhaps took part in it as a volunteer rather than in the regularly enrolled forces of the Commune. The nobility was more numerous on the opposing side; but this could not be a temptation for Francis to abandon the cause of his own people: a man of the people himself, he would gladly have been ennobled; but not now that the nobles had returned to place their feet upon the people's neck.

Francis was so full of adventurous gaiety that not even prison, which followed upon Collestrada, could extinguish it, though the conditions of prison life in those days were not very agreeable. His serenity was such that his prison companions were affected by it. Among them was a nobleman possessed by overweening pride: he was incensed at having had to fight for the bourgeoisie against his own class, and with such a result. His companions detested him cordially, and unanimously avoided him. Francis succeeded in making him more tractable and in reconciling him with the rest.

Francis' serenity in prison was not merely youthful generosity and lightness of heart. In the enforced leisure of the darkened prison chamber, so propitious to examinations of conscience, Francis began to become aware of a

mighty force latent in the depths of his spirit. He took to talking to his companions about a future greatness that was to be his. These discussions were full of his usual levity and arrogance, but accompanied by a vague and mysterious presentiment, a first and passing flash of what was to come. After the lapse of a year he and his companions were released and Francis returned to his ordinary life: in the daytime he helped his father or took his place in business, in the evening he lived his own life. And at his side was the crowd of his young comrades, hailing him as the king of their revels, and rioting in tumultuous gaiety through the city streets.

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THE release of the prisoners was possibly a result of the agreement concluded in November, 1203, at San Rufino, between the nobles and the people of Assisi. It imposed on the Commune a whole series of fines, together with the repair and restoration of the nobles' houses that had been damaged in the struggle; moreover, it reintroduced, though with important limitations, the system of feudal homage and tenure of the soil. The defeated side agreed, and the confiscation of the land was carried out by those who had passed over to the enemy on the outbreak of the war with Perugia. The Assisans were one and all forbidden to make any alliance or pact with whatever party to the detriment of the Commune, and without the permission of the Government. Still, this agreement was not sufficient definitely to establish peace. In August, 1205, the *Podestà* of Perugia

put forward further claims to compensation and restitution in favour of the exiles; the claims were not admitted, but the threat remained. If Francis had dreamed of glory for himself and aggrandizement for the city as a result of the war, his dream lay in fragments on the ground.

These local conflicts were still proceeding when the Commune of Assisi became involved in another and more troublesome dispute, though its material effects were not more serious – with the central power of the Pope. In the Patrimony of St. Peter the city and the feudal lords exercised direct authority, but the city itself was governed by the Commune and not by the Pontiff. The Pope, who could alone bestow the imperial crown, and distributed royal crowns throughout Europe and received the feudal homage of their wearers, was in Rome little more than a tolerated guest; often, indeed, he was not tolerated at all, and had to fly to Viterbo, Orvieto, or Perugia, thence to launch his thunderbolts on all Europe. Innocent III had improved the situation; but his government amounted to hardly more than a delegation of his authority to the chief senator of the Commune; and even that represented a considerable victory. It was a labour of Sisyphus: while at Assisi peace seemed in sight once more, at least within the city, a civil war had broken out in Rome between papalists and anti-papalists and had lasted several months. Moreover, it was not merely the Commune and the feudal lords who were trying to limit, to reduce, and to destroy the power of one who proclaimed himself Vicar of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. With them was the Emperor likewise, who,

though considered by the Pope as in some sense his vassal, in so far as he received his crown at the Pope's hands, was none the less the overlord of the Patrimony of St. Peter and of Rome itself: especially of Rome, capital of the Empire. In this chaos of authorities, this whirlpool of divergent and contradictory principles, conflicts were perennial and solutions could be but temporary. There was always matter for dispute, if only because a quarrel on a given point seemed essential as a safeguard on all the others. The Roman pontificate, which was spiritually very powerful, made almost unlimited claims on the temporal side, though almost entirely devoid of material support. The spiritual arm had therefore to be employed, of necessity, on every occasion to defend the papal system, especially in the Patrimony of St. Peter. The papal authorities had to be especially effective and vigilant where cases of conscience were concerned.

The Commune of Assisi had almost become involved in a case of conscience. At the time, the city was oscillating between government by the consuls and by the *podestà*, as was happening nearly everywhere, and this indicated a rather disturbed state of affairs in the city. For the year 1204 one Gerardo Gilberti had been chosen *podestà;* but the Cardinal of Santa Maria in Aquiro, spiritual and temporal representative of the Pope in the Duchy of Spoleto, proclaimed him excommunicate and declared his nomination invalid. The Assisans kept Gerardo in his post. It was a typical dispute between the ecclesiastical and the lay power. Against the Commune's claim to the privilege of choosing its own rulers was the contention of the Roman

curia that no one could be appointed to any post who was not at peace with the ecclesiastical authority: that authority on which, four centuries later, Bellarmine was to theorize under the designation: "the indirect authority (*podestà*) of the Roman Pontiff."

Innocent launched an interdict against the rebellious city. Perhaps he would not so quickly have had recourse to this expedient had it not been for the necessity at that particular moment of affirming his authority over the Duchy of Spoleto. It was not merely the recollection of the reverse of six years before, and the storming of the citadel. It was essential to defeat the machinations of Philip of Swabia (the excommunicated pretender to the imperial crown), who had shortly before sent into central Italy, as his legate, Leopold, Archbishop-elect of Magonza, whose appointment had not been confirmed by Innocent. Philip did not recognize the acquisition of the Duchy and the March by the Church. They were, for the Pope, recent and insecure possessions which it was important to consolidate.

The burden of the interdict lay very heavily on every religious and Catholic society of the time. The churches were shut, the bells were silent; there were no more baptisms (except of infants in peril of death), no marriages, no funeral rites. The city was bowed down under the weight of its punishment: Gerardo was dismissed before his period of office had elapsed, and the citizens made an act of submission to the Cardinal of Santa Croce in Jerusalem, who had come to Assisi, and to crown their submission they sent an embassy to Rome.

The Commune of Assisi had very soon capitulated to the interdict. But it must not be thought that the papal censure, however dreaded, produced such an effect invariably and immediately. In that very year, 1204, in which the Assisans were released from the interdict as a result of their complete submission, at Piacenza the Bishop and his clergy were ejected from the city; and they remained outside, notwithstanding the papal excommunications, for the space of three and a half years. A few years later a city nearer to Assisi, Narni, was to give proof of an even more determined obstinacy. Among the Italians of that age, deep religious feeling and a sincere respect for the Church were frequently found in company with considerable liberty of judgment and action with regard to individual manifestations of religious authority. It was the time when the Roman noble Giovanni Capocci ventured to interrupt a discourse of Innocent III with the ejaculation: "Your mouth is the mouth of God, but your works are the works of the Devil." And a Guelph writer, who was not content to abandon Otto when the Pope had been pleased to decide against him, had no scruple about accusing Innocent (unjustifiably) of having been bribed by Philip of Swabia. The desire to put an end to the ecclesiastical conflicts became more and more intense among the majority of the population; but the dispute was very seldom brought to so speedy an end as, on the above-mentioned occasion, at Assisi. Perhaps it was due to the overwhelming influence of the clergy, who, as we have seen, forty years earlier had, equally with the people, represented the public interest; or to the strong re-

ligious feeling of the people of Assisi, which could not even for a short time endure to be deprived of sacraments and ceremonies; or, rather, to the insecure position of the Commune both within and without. It is certain that Francis later on displayed a devotion to the use of the sacraments, and in particular to that of the Eucharist, considerably stronger than was common at the time; and one is led to think that the insistence with which he emphasized that the consecration and administration of the body of Christ are reserved for priests alone, and that for that reason they must always claim our obedience and respect, is a recollection of those melancholy times.

But the religious submission of the Commune had no great effect on its political obedience to the Holy See. In July, 1205, Philip of Swabia proclaimed his sovereignty over Assisi. In order to reward the Assisans for the good welcome they had given a few months before to his legate Leopold, he forgave their past misdeeds (i.e., the insurrection of 1198) and acknowledged, within certain limitations, the independence of the Commune. The citizens were to be allowed complete freedom in the election of the consuls, and the surrounding country was to be governed by the ducal court in agreement with them. The Imperial Government pledged itself not to rebuild the citadel and not to make any agreements with Perugia and the Assisan exiles who had allied themselves with that city, without a previous understanding with the consuls of Assisi. The district of Nocera was placed under Assisan administration in the absence of the imperial officials. In this way Assisi

had found in the Imperial Government an ally against Perugia.

The Pontiff was not mentioned in the document. The omission may have been out of respect, but its political significance was considerable. The Commune of Assisi, oppressed by a more powerful neighbour and by one, and that the nearest at hand, of the two great powers of the age, turned to redress the balance, to the remoter of the two and preferred to recognize its authority. This meant a twofold revolt against the Pontiff, in his capacity as Pope – he had not recognized Philip – and in his capacity as overlord of Assisi. The interdict and the subsequent submission to the Cardinal of Aquiro had not made their effects felt for very long.

This time the matter was passed over. Not even Innocent III could be continually launching interdicts; moreover, there had been bad news from Germany about Otto, the Guelph claimant recognized by the Pope, and it had become more important to withdraw the papal censure against Philip and his supporters. The Pontiff began negotiations for peace. One of Philip's daughters had been promised, or so it is related, as wife to the Pope's brother Richard; and the princess was to have brought as her dowry the imperial rights over the Marquisate of Tuscany, the Duchy of Spoleto, and the March of Ancona – the same kingdom which, three centuries later, was coveted and partly conquered by the son of Alexander VI, Duke Valentino. But even in these dealings with the Empire the Pontiff was still pursued by the fate of Sisyphus. When the agreement

awaited only ratification, Philip was laid low by the dagger of Otto of Wittelsbach; and the other Otto claimed his royal and imperial heritage without diminution, and no longer dependent on the support of Pope Innocent. Not long afterwards the Duchy of Spoleto and the city of Assisi itself were to see him passing by in triumph on his way to Rome.

CHAPTER FOUR

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IN SEARCH OF A WAY OF LIFE

In a small community at the beginning of the thirteenth century local happenings were immediately affected by the important events of European politics. The time was one of a continual and restless struggle for political and economic power, in which the force of arms was constantly seeking support in legal arguments and the authority of religion. The average citizen, wearied by the daily toil necessary to support life, could only have caught dim and broken echoes of all this disturbance; and the average citizen, then as now, constituted four fifths of the population. Francis was an average citizen for a part of the day, while he too worked in his father's shop; but he ceased to be so when the shop was shut and he laid aside his shopman's clothes and, what was more important, his shopman's mind, and rejoined his companions. Public affairs are always a popular topic at parties and banquets: the Podestà Gerardo and the Cardinal of Aquiro, King Philip and his envoy Leopold, King Otto and Innocent III, the affairs of the Empire and those of the Kingdom of Sicily were the current gossip of this idle company. And among the political disputes and the intrigues of diplomacy, and more tempting than both of them to these young men, flashed the gleam of arms.

It had indeed a peculiar fascination for Francis. At

that time his usual ambition to distinguish himself and at last to be raised to the ranks of the nobility was combined with a longing to free himself from a painful state of mind into which he had fallen on recovering from a long and dangerous illness. When the body lies prone in the grip of disease, and death has it by the throat, then the soul is silent and hides fearfully within the tormented body; the only feeling left awake is the breathless craving for life. But when the struggle grows less intense and the fear of death grows more remote, then the spirit awakens once more within the weak and exhausted body, and moves more swiftly and more freely, now that its material covering is less opaque and oppressive: and its voice is heard, low, but very clear, with unfamiliar tones and a more penetrating quality. Then we become aware of feelings hitherto unknown to us, and we view our life in unfamiliar aspects. Most of these are insubstantial clouds, soon to be dissipated by the sterile wind of daily life, to which we return when our health is restored. In some few, however, are seeds deeply sown which later on come to fulfilment in magnificent flowers of poetry, or bear fruit in mighty works blessed by the Muse of Romance.

One day of his convalescence Francis, who had begun to walk about the house leaning on a stick, thought the time had come for him to go and breathe the country air; he opened the door and went out, undoubtedly on to the road from Spello and Foligno, which was nearest to his house and most convenient for him, being almost level. The road runs along the side of Subasio: on the left rise the curves

of the broad mountain shoulder, here green with woods and there showing the bare red rocks: on the right the ground slopes away gently, clothed in the uniform soft pallor of the olive. Before him, where the plain stretches away to Foligno, green and fertile, cypresses and oaks strike a livelier note of colour. Of all the landscapes round Assisi it is the sweetest and most attractive.

Francis, who had not looked at this view for a long time, sought anxiously for his usual sensations at the sight of it. But the mountains and the slopes, the plain and cypresses and olives, had nothing more to say to him; they were strange, inanimate objects. An icy insensibility froze his heart: everything that until then had served to enliven his existence had become a blurred, insipid dream. The world had suddenly become a barren desert.

It is in such moments of desolation and vacancy that, for predestined spirits, great vocations are born; but, even so, the time may not be yet. They hesitate, and are torn, and grope their way in darkness. The old life no longer brings satisfaction; but they are not yet sure what the new one ought to be, and they are even doubtful whether any such exists. They are moved to cast out from their existence the old contentment, as insipid and colourless; but they are as yet uncertain what to put in its place.

In Francis there was no thunderbolt of a sudden conversion, no immediate leap from one life into another. There was no sudden revelation like that of St. Paul on the way to Damascus; nor, as in many saints, the sudden possession of the mind by an overwhelming fear of the dread

"last things," death, judgment, and hell. In Francis his youthful dissipation had left a simple and lively faith unimpaired. And yet, when his crisis was upon him, he did not appear to be obsessed by a preoccupation with eternal salvation, but rather with a desire to find an object for his life in this world, an activity that would satisfy his aspirations old and new.

At every turn and in every place young men who like the "good things of life" – elegant clothes, sumptuous banquets, revels, love, and adventures – are greatly drawn to a soldier's life, and consider it as the only one worth living in place of, or rather in addition to, the one to which they are accustomed. In past ages more than at the present time the profession of arms attracted the chivalrous, the unconventional, and the adventurous: it meant an escape from the daily round, glory, feminine conquests, rank, and fortune. The fascination was most intense at the time of the crusades, both in the communes and throughout the country-side, when every peasant who took part might aspire to become a Marcellus.

The claims of his commune had already drawn Francis towards the profession of arms, but it was not enough to satisfy him. The disputes of a handful of paltry merchants and insignificant nobles over a house or the ownership of a mill, the petty wars of raids and rapine under the very city walls, made no appeal to him, after his short and unlucky experience. Of the disputes between Church and Empire he understood but little: he had a respect for ecclesiastical censure, for he had experienced in his own city its blighting

effect on his religious life. He sought for far-away adventure, a mighty war, without scruples of conscience, with much glory and the crown of nobility at the end of it.

There was at that time in Assisi a certain noble who, perhaps tired likewise of the petty existence of a small commune, and embarrassed in fortune (the economic crisis had begun to affect the nobility), had undertaken the enrolment of soldiers with the intention of leading them into Puglia to fight under the French captain Walter of Brienne. Rich in lineage, but with scanty resources, Walter had married a deposed princess, one of the daughters of King Tancred of Sicily, who had been consigned to a German prison in the company of Henry VI's widow and had thence escaped to France. Walter had come from France to offer his services to Pope Innocent, against the German barons who were ravaging the lands of the young king Frederick. There in the south this destitute noble without lands or money could seek his fortune, with the papal blessing; there body and soul alike found proper scope for their activity. The Assisan noble was proposing to join Walter, and with him the plebeians of Assisi, in pursuit of ennoblement. He had long thought that southwards lay the great war of his dreams: entire provinces were in arms against each other, and the prize was a vast and flourishing kingdom; and not far off was the East, the mysterious and sacred East. For Walter, as soon as he had secured the principality of Lecce, which he claimed by right of his wife, was intending to cross the sea on a crusade.

So Francis presented himself to the noble in question

for enrolment, and from his lavish way of life he must have seemed a satisfactory and indeed valuable recruit. And while they were considering and planning out the expedition, their imagination busy with weapons and weaponed men, he dreamed one night of his house full of helmets, lances, and saddles: a marvellous spectacle, indeed, within the walls of the merchant Pietro Bernardoni. In his amazement he heard a voice say to him that these were arms for his soldiers. The dream revealed and foreshadowed what for a long while had been the secret desire of the ambitious young merchant, though he kept it to himself and did not publish it abroad.

This propitious dream quickened the eagerness of this candidate for rank and glory, and confirmed his resolution; but when the vividness of his first impression had been lost and the day of departure drew near, his feeling of exhilaration began to diminish. Francis no longer felt sure that this was the way to happiness and his vocation. But he had given his word; and there was already much inquisitive, admiring, and bantering talk about the son of Pietro Bernardoni, who had lately left the paternal bales of cloth to march in arms to the conquest of Puglia, with the consent of his father, who, with the ambition of the *nouveau riche,* had undertaken to bear the expense and do without his son's help in his business. Above all, Francis must have been apprehensive that if the prospect of this hope of a new life came to nothing, he would once more be plunged into the intolerable vacuity of his usual existence. The preparations were hastened on, so as to put an end to any hesitation

over an accomplished fact; and finally the day came when he went forth from Assisi in the full panoply of war.

When he reached Spoleto, he felt unwell and was compelled to stop there. During the rest and solitude of his recovery his profound feeling of inner discontent, possibly rendered more acute by something that happened to him, developed into a veritable crisis. The enterprise he had undertaken seemed paltry and unworthy. He was on the way to becoming the servant of a servant of an exiled French baron, and he would be fighting under the command, and in the interest, of another. But Francis wanted to be first in some truly great enterprise and began to ask himself whether he should not look for it in quite another direction. It is related that he had a dream which made clear to him that his former vision had a spiritual significance: he was to become a soldier and fight at the head of soldiers, but under the banner of the Lord God. Francis broke off his journey and returned to Assisi. His proud and sensitive soul must have been deeply hurt by the astonished glances of his fellow-citizens and their far from flattering comments. But an internal joy sustained him: and, as if in defiance of the contemptuous hostility around, he returned to his conviction (which had come over him in the prison at Perugia) that, without going to Puglia, he would become a great personage.

Of one thing he became increasingly certain: that God was particularly concerned in his destiny, and reserved him for some mighty mission. What this might be he did not yet

know, and he could not picture it to himself without worldly characteristics: hence the rather arrogant prophecy of his future greatness flung out in the face of the sarcastic laughter of the Assisans. The as yet unknown divine gift appeared to him sometimes under the aspect of a great hidden treasure, and sometimes in the guise of a beautiful wife of high rank. Thus he would speak of it to his friends, in riddles; and a riddle it still was to Francis himself.

The travail of his doubts and his inner transformation constantly drew him forth to remote and solitary places. His sole companion on these journeys was a friend of his own age, one of those intimate friends who are excellent company though they say nothing. The most frequent goal of his wanderings was a cave outside the city, perhaps in that mountain ridge three hundred yards above Assisi, which from its desolate situation was called "the Prisons" (*le Carceri*) in the language of the time. When he arrived, Francis left his friend and went alone inside the cave to pray to God to enlighten him. He believed that a knowledge of His will would put an end to his distress of mind, which had by this time become so intense as to be almost intolerable. A press of different ideas thronged his brain, but none of them could bring him peace; he was tormented by a wild desire to act, to do, he knew not how or what.

Of this internal travail his friend, who followed him on his journeyings, knew little or nothing. Francis hid it from all the others, though they could perhaps catch a hint of it from his enigmatic phrases and a certain new and

mysterious intensity in his expression and demeanour. But their thoughts turned rather to youthful vagaries: the more so as the son of Pietro Bernardoni, by his manner of life, his speech and behaviour, had naturally acquired a somewhat extravagant reputation; and the last episode of the abortive expedition to Puglia did nothing to discredit it. Externally, apart from these expeditions with a solitary companion, his daily life remained much as before. He went on working in his father's shop, and sometimes he would join in the revels of his old friends. Once more he made one at the old riotous and free-spoken feasts, at which he was unanimously elected king of the banquet, because, being richer or more extravagant than the rest, he paid for all the company. His pride was undiminished and impelled him to join their parties. When the dinner was over, the dark and silent streets of Assisi would ring once more with the songs of his somewhat heated boon companions.

But Francis was changed. One night, as he was following his companions through the city carrying a royal sceptre in his hand, he suddenly became entirely absorbed in all those strange thoughts which for some time had been always present to his mind, and he stayed behind, unnoticed by the rest. Alone, in the silence of the sleeping city, he forgot his companions, the place and time, and everything, and fell into a marvellous ecstasy, an indescribable apprehension of the infinite. He stayed thus in a trance, erect, motionless, until his companions remembered, and returned to look for him. When he recovered consciousness, he felt

an insuperable disgust for his companions and he took refuge outside the city, on Subasio, where he fell to prayer.

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In all the painful uncertainty of these inner struggles one characteristic became more and more marked and, indeed, throws the first flash of light on his life that was to come. An immense pity for the poor grew up in his heart and he relieved them most generously. The charity to which he was naturally inclined by his kindly disposition and his lavish ways had been strengthened by remorse for having on one occasion roughly turned away a poor man who asked for alms for the love of God, while he was occupied in serving customers in the shop. He immediately repented of his churlish behaviour; not only because it was contrary to his habitual courtesy, but because it seemed unworthy to have refused anyone who asked "in the name of so great a King." And in one of his characteristic sudden impulses he had sworn never to send away with empty hands one who had asked help for the love of God.

Opportunities for carrying out his vow were not wanting. The economic prosperity of Italian cities of that time must not be exaggerated. Capital was limited, and indeed would appear today insignificant; moreover, it was the result of an economic transformation that inevitably brought with it a burden of ruin and misery. All manner of troubles arose from the new economic organization which was founded on centralization in the cities, on the liberation of property and persons from the bonds of feudalism, on the

circulation of money, the extension of the area of exchange, and the growth of industry and commerce. Capitalism took the place of an almost paternal regime. Isolated groups whose economic life was self-sufficient and, though rudimentary, could guarantee a loaf of bread to every member of that group, were things of the past. In the hard struggle of incipient competition some had achieved relative opulence, by the increase in value of their estates and farms, by successful manufacture, prosperous commerce, or profitable usury, but many had fallen into economic ruin and social degradation. Beside the new rich stood the new poor, perhaps more numerous than the former.

The noble whom Francis met one day clad, not in shining armour, but in miserable rags must have been one of these "new poor." Perhaps he had been forced to make over to some moneyed bourgeois his feudal rights over his tiny inheritance; and, having soon consumed the proceeds, had been reduced to begging for alms. Francis felt for the nobles the respect of a bourgeois who has grown rich and aspires to be admitted to their number. When he saw the man dressed in clothes so unworthy of his rank, he took off his own garments and gave them to him, and himself put on the poor man's rags. The assistance was perhaps not very appropriate, but it was an instance of that intense love and compassion that Francis had by then achieved. He had not given alms from a well-filled purse, but he had despoiled himself, and for a moment he had made himself poor.

That quarter of an hour of poverty was to leave a vivid recollection, an unusual savour, behind it, not un-

mingled with regret. Certain it is that thenceforward on more than one occasion he despoiled himself of his clothes to give them to the poor; so that what had on this occasion been a chance event became an opportunity for which he sought and a willing experience. At the same time he made a great step forward; he dressed as a poor man and went begging. It was at Rome, whither he had gone on a pilgrimage, perhaps seeking peace and enlightenment from St. Peter. When the other pilgrims had reached the crypt over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, they laid down with hesitating hand a modest offering. Francis (not without a touch of his old arrogant pride) emptied his entire purse into the box for offerings; then, taking aside one of the ragged crowd who were thronging the entrance, picking up the crumbs from the rich man's table, he made him exchange his rags for the clothes he himself was wearing, which were those of a rich and well-dressed young man; and, thus disguised, he held out his hand with the rest. He found a great pleasure in so doing; and when, as time went by, he began to feel the promptings of his stomach, he bought some mean food with the alms he had collected, and set about eating it with an excellent appetite among his newly acquired companions.

The escape from ordinary life – the experience of another life, different and diametrically opposite; poor, but free from anxiety – was this time complete. But it was only for a moment, and it was artificial and scarcely in earnest. His hour of beggary had been the indulgence of a caprice for Francis, which he would not have indulged had

he not been unrecognized by his acquaintances. Thus he would always be in a blind alley. He felt his calling as a merchant and his wealth like a burden upon him, with all its attendant petty anxieties and tedious pleasures, and he longed for freedom; but he did not know how to obtain it and what use to make of it. Poverty as a purely personal satisfaction was hardly a sufficient introduction to the new life, representing the fulfilment of his dreams of earthly glory which his wealth had failed to realize and which he had now renounced in favour of loftier aspirations. The decisive blow was the result of a real victory over himself, a victory of his love of his fellow men over the haughty fastidiousness of his natural disposition.

Outside the city of Assisi and below it, near the road from Santa Maria degli Angeli to Foligno, was a hospital, or rather a place of seclusion, for lepers. These poor creatures, who were held in general loathing on account of their appearance and dreadful odour, and from fear of contagion, were banished to this place. No one felt the loathing more strongly than Francis, who, when he caught sight of the leper-house on his walks outside the walls, began to hold his nose a mile away. One day as he was riding in the neighbourhood, he was stopped by a leper who asked for alms. Francis resisted his first impulse to shake his bridle and gallop away by remembering his oath not to refuse alms to whoever should ask him for the love of God. But an inner voice warned him that this poor creature asked in silence something more and better than merely alms: he wanted someone to treat him like a man

and a brother. Francis leapt from his horse, gave the man his purse, and kissed his hand and his mouth. It was a sudden compulsion, something outside himself, that drove him to this act; and it left him in a kind of trance. But the joy that remained in his heart impelled him after a few days to transform the impulse of a moment into a deliberate act. He forced himself to go to the lepers' hospital, which he had hitherto looked upon with horror from afar, did works of charity among its inmates, and gave to all the kiss of fellowship.

The test was harder than begging for alms in the doorway of St. Peter's; harder, but holier and more human. It was not the sensation of an isolated experience, but the triumph of brotherly love over his own feelings. Francis began then to understand that his new life could be achieved only through sacrifice for others. Near the end of his days, when Francis was looking back on his past life, he dated his actual conversion from this episode.

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Francis had not yet abandoned his "secular" existence, and he continued to carry on the paternal business. One day when there was a fair at Foligno, he went thither with a bale of merchandise, which he sold to advantage. He also found an opportunity of selling on favorable terms his horse on which he had ridden to the place: his return on foot was a trifle to his young limbs, accustomed to long walks. It was about a three hours' journey.

So he returned, having disposed of his cloth, but

laden with money; and he felt a disgust with his load. It was not the material burden, but the moral discomfort: his dislike of money extended to its acquisition and management generally. The grasping meannesses of trade had always been distasteful to his proud disposition and his chivalrous ambitions. The lawsuits of the city over a few feet of land or the wall of a house betrayed the moral degradation and the melancholy hatreds bred by possessions and the disputes arising from them. The affection that he felt towards the poor, as it grew more sympathetic, made him more alive to certain practices involved in the accumulation of wealth. Such practices were not unknown in his father's shop and indeed became traditional in the house of Bernardoni: many years later a nephew of St. Francis, son of his brother Angelo, felt impelled to provide in his will that so much should be taken from his estate as might be necessary to make reparation for profits made by unfair means and from money lent at usury. . . . And in those times, when the economic conscience was as yet undeveloped and the capitalist system had hardly begun, making money in trade involved, in the popular consciousness, a sort of moral taint. Lending money at interest, the backbone of trade, was, as is well known, formally condemned by the Church, even though she was compelled in practice to tolerate and make use of it herself.

That day, as he was returning home with his pockets full of money, Francis, as he walked along, ruminated on all the good that he could do with it: something that would truly satisfy his soul. Still progressing on his way and

plunged in meditation, he came upon a small level clearing under the walls of the city, on which stood a little old ruined church, San Damiano. The evening (it must have been a day in the autumn of 1206) was at hand. The sun as it set behind Perugia shed a rosy glow on the rocky ridge of Subasio: round the little church the grey olives obscured the view of the green plain, on which the first shadows were falling. Unbroken silence and profound peace.

Francis was tired and stopped a moment to refresh himself with the view and the solitude. Always religious, and now more so than ever, he entered the half-darkened church and knelt down to pray before a crucifix lately painted on the chapel wall, whose long, oval face, in its aureole of locks flowing down upon its shoulders, hung motionless in an attitude no longer of Byzantine insensibility, but of profound human resignation. Francis prayed, completely absorbed in the thought, which had now become habitual to him, of his still uncertain vocation; and it seemed as if his uncertainties might find relief in the inspiration of religious solitude. He would stay in that quiet and remote spot, meditating and praying before that picture, and employ his money in helping the poor priest who looked after the neglected little church, in repairing the walls which had fallen into decay, and in giving alms to the poor. He sought out the priest and told him of his intentions. The latter looked at him in stupefaction; he had heard tell of the life of the son of Pietro Bernardoni and knew him to be in the habit of spending his money and

passing his days in quite another manner. Upon Francis' insistence, however, he consented to allow him to lodge in the little house adjoining the church; but he could not be induced to accept his well-filled purse. Francis was the son of a well-known family and it was necessary first to know what his father might think.

The night had come and gone and the new day had dawned, but Francis had not returned. Pietro was uneasy about his son and his business and set about looking for him everywhere; at last he learnt that Francis had taken refuge at San Damiano and proposed to lead the life of a hermit and to spend all that he had upon the church in addition to the money he had brought back from the fair at Foligno.

The merchant had hitherto tolerated his son's vagaries and extravagances because the latter, when all was said, did his duty in the business; and the riotous and luxurious life which he led, on an equality with and even at the head of young men of good family, cast a certain agreeable lustre on the house of the *nouveau riche*. He too had indulged in ambitious dreams for his son: he had given his consent and loosened his purse-strings for the expedition to Puglia; and Francis' inconclusive return must have been received by his father with mixed feelings. He had subsequently followed his son's changes of humour and habits with a certain dubious hostility. And now the merchant was to develop, not into a knight, but a hermit. The spending of money, even throwing it out of the window, to make a good figure in the world and to climb up the

social ladder might be tolerated; but to squander it on rebuilding wretched little country churches and on providing food for a starveling priest or a crowd of beggars, this, in the eyes of Pietro Bernardoni, was the most abominable folly. It would be a gross betrayal if his son, who was his chief support in the business and the ornament of his house, threw everything away to retire with his rascally companion to vegetate in a despicable idleness. He unburdened himself to his neighbours and friends; and, in their company, he made his way in the direction of San Damiano to assert his parental authority.

Francis, who must have expected the expedition, heard the company approaching and ran away to hide himself. His vocation was not yet clear and strong enough to imbue him with the necessary courage to face this sudden storm. After a futile search on all sides, Pietro and his following returned discomfited to Assisi. Francis had been very much alarmed, and his feelings in this respect were much in accord with his need of solitude. He remained a whole month in his underground retreat, where the priest brought him food from time to time. Francis wept, fasted, and prayed. He prayed that God would save him from the hands of his incensed parent and that he might be given light and strength to lead the new life. In this dark solitude a serene joy began to grow within him, and his heart became filled with gay courage. He could see that he was wronging himself and his Lord, by remaining hid in this way through fear and shame. He went forth, climbed the slope, and entered the city.

Francis was not really a good-looking young man. He was rather small in person, with slim legs; the shape of his head was markedly round, his face long and thin, his forehead low; and his cheeks were covered with a scanty, unkempt black beard. Moreover, at that moment he was in a sad state as the result of a month passed in an obscure hiding-place and his voluntary and involuntary privations, tormented by the fear of his father and his own inner struggles. His appearance in this guise in the streets of Assisi, and the story which had got about regarding his strange change of life had given rise to general ridicule and amusement. He was greeted with laughter, jests, and insults, and, from the dregs of the populace, handfuls of dirt and stones. It was thus that Francis returned to the streets and squares of Assisi, which only a few weeks previously had seen him pass in festal array, the king of the revels, accompanied by a crowd of riotous courtiers. Among the jeering crowd, or possibly behind them, there was perhaps more than one friend who had envied Francis' prestige and worldly successes in the past and was now gloating over the fall of his detested rival.

The new-fledged hermit kept on his way to his father's house, firm in his resolutions of courage and of patience. The latter was the more necessary and the more difficult. The crowd and the uproar increased. The tumult reached the ears of Pietro, and he caught his son's name shouted out in tones of mockery and scorn. He went out of his shop, and the disgraceful scene met his eyes: the blood rushed to his head, and in an impulse, not of pity, but of

shame and madness, he forced his way through the clamorous crowd, seized Francis, dragged him into the house, and flung him into a dark cellar. He informed his son that there he would stay until he had rid himself of his madness and returned to his duty as a son and his calling as a merchant. As his words and the blows that accompanied them had no effect, he left him bound in his dark place of confinement.

A few days later Pietro had to leave Assisi on business. Pica remained at home on guard over the prisoner. The obscure presentiments of greatness which for many years she had felt for her best-loved son returned to her mind: the reality of today was something quite other. But her mother's love had remained unchanged through all her disillusion. Pica tried to win by affectionate words where the stern Pietro with all the severities of paternal authority had failed. But she succeeded no better than her husband. Then she obeyed the impulse of her heart alone: she unloosed Francis' bonds and told him to place himself in safety before the paternal jailer should return. She could do no more. It was not in his own family that Francis was to find faith and followers.

Francis knew but one retreat: San Damiano, his hermitage. He returned there forthwith, but this time he did not hide himself; so that when his father returned and found the bird flown (Pica was left to endure the merchant's fury), he had no trouble in finding his degenerate son. But he saw him so firm and certain of his purpose, so armed with indifference against all further persecution, that he lost heart. He felt that an insurmountable wall had

arisen between himself and his son. The hopes he had placed in his heir, his help and successor in the business, who was, moreover, to bring lustre on his humble home, even to the attainment of noble rank, lay in fragments on the ground. It remained for him only to clear up the financial aspect of the situation as best he could. It was necessary to get Francis to restore all that he had had in the way of effects pertaining to the family business, which he had now abandoned for a new life; and above all to recover the profits from the Foligno fair, which had begun so well and ended so ill. And, in addition, Francis was to renounce all claim to a share in his father's business and estate.

Bernardoni applied to the Assisan magistrates to require Francis to restore his father's money. But the young hermit had not lost his pride: it was changed, but it was stronger than ever. He had given up wealth, his gay life, and his family to be free, face to face with God: he had nothing to do with the consuls of Assisi, or with any other earthly authority. This, or something like it, was what he said to the messenger who brought him the summons. The consuls, who were not greatly interested in a dispute with the vagaries of the new Saint, advised Bernardoni to call in the good offices of the Bishop: the hermit might perhaps show himself more amenable to him as the representative of Christ. And Francis did in fact accept Bishop Guido's invitation to come and see him. There he found his father, and a crowd of inquisitive persons who came to see how the suit would end.

The Bishop pointed out to Francis, in affectionate terms, that it was not right to devote to pious uses money that was not his, but his father's: it would be an offence against sacred things. Francis made no objection. The legal aspect of property concerned him no longer. He knew this much: that for a few paltry coins his father had for two months persecuted his own offspring, the flesh of his flesh, and, having imprisoned and bound him like a malefactor, had dragged him from one tribunal to another. His aversion to money, to all the obligations, oppressions, and injustice that derive from it, which had been working in his mind for some time, now broke out into open revolt; but his feelings were transfigured by the new spirit of religion which spoke within his heart. He answered accordingly that he desired to restore to his father not merely the money, but the very clothes he was wearing; he would thus despoil himself of everything in the sight of the Lord, and thenceforward would no longer address himself to his father Pietro, but to Our Father which art in heaven. He then impatiently tore off his clothes and flung them in a heap at his father's feet. The Bishop, greatly moved, ran down from his throne and covered him with the episcopal mantle.

In this way Francis put an end to the dispute which his father had started, by taking flight into the higher spheres of religious idealism, in which the words " mine " and " yours " have no meaning. Those who came to him and talked about the legal principles safeguarding property he would answer by ignoring any such rights, his own

as much as his father's, and impressing upon his hearer that he had renounced all possessions, not as a compulsory sacrifice, but from a joyous impulse towards freedom and union with God. Trampling twelve centuries beneath his feet at one blow, the ignorant little Umbrian merchant had rediscovered and fulfilled, through the creative power of his religious genius, the saying of Jesus: "And him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also"; upheld by his faith in Jesus and in the Father, who clothes the lilies of the field and gives sustenance to the birds of the air.

CHAPTER FIVE

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FROM HERMIT TO APOSTLE

FRANCIS WAS NOW FREE IN VERY TRUTH: ALONE AND deprived of everything, but free. After so much forced and timid inactivity, he felt the need of wandering far afield. He clad himself in some cast-off clothes belonging to the Bishop's gardener, and immediately turned his steps away from Assisi, and not in the direction of San Damiano. In this part the roads were too familiar and frequented, and nature too gay for his present feelings. He wanted a solitude more complete and more austere. So, outside the present Porta Perlici, he took the road to Nocera, which leads toward the Apennine mountains.

This part of the Assisan landscape forms a complete contrast with the better-known country towards the plain. It is a bare, majestic, almost Alpine landscape. On one side, the narrow road climbs up towards the mountains, which seem to bar the way at every turn. On the other side, the slope falls away steeply towards the narrow valley, down which the arid Tescio crawls along its rocky bed. No sign of men or flocks, no houses nor fields. Through the scanty clumps of trees looms up the broad back of Subasio, seamed with veins and fissures of rock and sand, almost blood-red in hue. At that time (it was still winter) the whiteness of the snow stood out against the background of red rock.

It proved an adventurous journey. When he reached the mountains, Francis found himself, at a certain point, traversing a wood. To soothe his depression and perhaps to ease the feeling of cold that penetrated his wretched rags to his very bones, he sang aloud in French, the language of his deeper emotions, hymns to the Lord. This brought a band of brigands on to the scene, who rushed out of their hiding-place to bar the way of this strange strolling singer. With a gay arrogance, equally characteristic of what he had been and what he had now become, Francis shouted: "I am the herald of the great King. What do you want of me?" They could not steal from him, for he had nothing. So they vented their ill-humour over their failure by throwing him into a ditch full of snow and shouting after him: "Lie there, you beggarly herald!" When they had departed, Francis got up, quickly shook the snow off his back, and went on his way, singing even louder then before. At last, having reached a monastery (because even God's jesters need a crust of bread and a roof to sleep under), he asked for lodging. He was treated as a vagabond and kept in the kitchen to do the work of a scullion. After a few days, as he was unable to get anything to eat or any clothes (the Bishop's gardener's coat was falling to pieces), he made up his mind to continue his journey and go to Gubbio and beg some clothes from a friend of days gone by.

In such conditions not even Francis could continue his vagabondage: and if he returned to Assisi (the friend had provided him with the necessary funds), it was richer

in experience than he had left it. He again took refuge at San Damiano and led the life of a hermit. It was not a new way of life, nor had it gone out of use; notwithstanding the multiplicity of the religious orders and their monasteries, it was not uncommon to find persons who had abandoned the world to give themselves to God, and retired into solitude for its own sake, without companions and unfettered by any rule. Not far off, at Spoleto, the green woods of Monte Luco, which dominated the city just as Subasio dominated Assisi, were full of hermits. And on Subasio itself, in the so-called "Prisons" and elsewhere, there were also a few.

Francis, however, was a hermit of a rather special kind. San Damiano was not in a mountain cave nor in the obscure recesses of a wood. It was on a cheerful little hill quite near the city. Moreover, Francis did not bury himself in meditation away from any contact with his fellow-creatures, although he had assumed the hermit's dress – a plain tunic reaching to his feet, with a girdle round his middle, sandals on his feet, and a staff in his hand. Even in the early days of his conversion the purely contemplative and solitary life was not for him. He revived his first idea of repairing the church; and since he had no money, neither his own nor his father's, there was nothing for it but to beg for alms, both for the church and for himself. This was a very different undertaking from his experience in the doorway of St. Peter's in Rome. Here it was a question of humiliating himself every day, and among people who until yesterday had known him under a very different

guise. The first day on which he begged for food from door to door, when he saw in front of him the collection of scraps that had been given to him, he was filled with loathing. Another time, having gone to ask for alms at a certain palace, he found a fête in progress and a crowd of people struggling at the doors. This was his company until yesterday and by them he had been hailed, in all his gaiety and pride, as king of the revels. The ordeal seemed too severe, and he turned back. But the moment he had done so, he felt that if he gave way now, it would be the end of everything: the new Francis would have died before he was born, and the old one would never come to life again. He went back into the middle of the gaily dressed throng and held out his hand for alms. But he was not content with begging for food for himself; he asked for oil for the lamp in front of the crucifix at San Damiano, and he asked for it in French. By a natural instinct he sought compensation in this unfamiliar idiom for his humiliating position. Alms were showered on him. And he knew how to ask for them with a certain originality: he shouted that whoever had given one stone for San Damiano should receive one absolution; for two stones, two absolutions, and so on.

It was the family of Francis that continued to feel this mendicant existence of his as an intolerable indignity. By this time their relations had completely come to an end; but his father and his brother Angelo could not be entirely ignorant of the kind of life led by a member of the same family in the same city, under their very eyes. When his brother saw him he jeered at him; his father, more hot-

blooded and violent, abused and cursed him: and in that very violence was a trace of the old affection, a sort of distorted pity for the state to which he saw his son reduced. Francis was not at all conscience-stricken, but he felt it deeply that instead of a father he now had an enemy; and he made up for it in some measure through his powers of dramatic representation, by getting one of the people to call him son and give him his blessing.

San Damiano was soon restored. When the work was finished, Francis undertook the repair of another church outside the walls: being unwilling to spend his time in idleness, and anxious to earn his bread, this occupation brought into harmony his desire for fresh air and movement and his need of employment. He was not content with collecting the materials, and begging, for the love of God, for stone and lime; but he worked himself. He alternated his labours and his journeys in search of funds with his visits and good offices at the leper-house, where he had won his first great victory over himself.

Not far off, on the plain below, stood the little Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli (the epithet refers, it seems, to old legends of angelic choirs that had been heard at this spot in days gone by); it belonged to the Monastery of San Benedetto. It was surrounded by a thick wood of oak-trees, after which, in ancient times, the place had been called the "Cerqueto," just as certain Umbrian villages bear the name today. Later the other name, "Porziuncola," or Porticella, came to be more commonly used, from the little plot of ground adjoining the chapel. The building,

which was small and rudimentary (being simply a rectangular erection in red stone, with hardly any plaster, blackened by age, and at one end of it a picture of the Madonna), had been abandoned for some time; and it was also falling into ruin. When the work on the second church had come to an end, Francis undertook the repair of the Chapel of Santa Maria.

These pious labours, which were carried on with such fervour for so long a time, impressed themselves on the minds of his fellow-citizens. When the bricklayer had become an apostle and founder of the Order, his more ardent followers looked upon this activity of his as a mystic symbol preordained by the divine will. Francis had begun the material restoration of churches because he was destined by God to become the religious restorer of the Church. And it is related that the Crucifix in San Damiano, in the mysterious colloquy that took place on that day, had commanded him to restore His church. We find the same motive in the dream of Innocent III; i.e., the Lateran threatening to collapse and supported by the Poor Brother Francis (or Dominic, according to the Dominican legend).

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In this way Francis spent the two years subsequent to that day when, on his return from the fair at Foligno, he had at San Damiano resolved to abandon the world.

From that day his life, after the violent differences with his father during the first few months, had passed humbly and peacefully. Francis felt near to God, at peace

with men and with himself. And yet he knew that for himself the definite and final word had not yet been spoken. The rebuilding of these old churches was a pious exercise and a pleasant employment; but it did not represent that new full life after which he had been aspiring for five years. He was still ambitious, though his ambition had changed its direction. Not for men or for human glory, but under the command of the Lord, in the divine scheme of things, Francis felt himself more than ever called to some more than common task.

No one could tell him what his work was to be: not even the Bishop Guido, with whom he sometimes talked. It is more than likely that he did not ask advice from anyone. The intimate and daily direction of consciences by the clergy was not so usual then as it became later, even among the more devout; pastoral ministrations were less intensive and more straightforward and indeed lay rather in the direction of general adhortations. The Assisan clergy, like the Assisan people, when they had got over their first surprise at the metamorphosis of the young merchant and at the strange manner of his rupture with his father, naturally looked upon Francis as one of those pious persons who leave the world and retire to a religious and solitary life. If Francis had asked any ecclesiastic what he ought to decide to do with his life, the latter would certainly have told him to enter one of the monastic orders. There were plenty of them, old and new. In the immediate neighbourhood of Assisi there were the Benedictines of Subasio, representing a very ancient and noble religious tradition.

For those who liked something more recent the Cistercians were available; the fame of St. Bernard was still potent. They were not very numerous in Italy, but they could count among their number one saint and seer who had died a few years previously, the Abbot Gioacchino, whose fame had spread far beyond the walls of the Calabrian monastery of San Giovanni in Fiore, which he founded. There were also the Canons Regular who followed the Rule named after St. Augustine; a special branch of these were the Premonstratensians, founded less than a century before by that Norbert who had almost rivalled St. Bernard himself in his saintly asceticism. In the general view, Christian society fell quite naturally into three divisions: the laity, intent upon the tasks of daily life; the secular clergy, who administered the divine sacraments and from time to time preached the word of God; and the monastic orders, for those who were desirous of securing their eternal salvation more actively by the practice of ascetic virtues, in retirement from the world.

In point of fact this division and partition of labour no longer seemed so natural or so satisfying to all religious minds. There were ecclesiastics, both secular and regular, who remembered the old days of a genuinely cœnobitic monasticism. The work of intellectual culture was being taken from the cloister and was now passing to the lay university. The cultivation of the fields, which had been carried on by the earliest sons of St. Bernard, had developed into an ordinary tenure of property, the feudal rights and changes and perpetual leases having been transferred to

private owners and, in some cases, to public bodies or organizations. The Cistercians, in an attempt to return to their origins, had resumed direct cultivation of the land by lay brothers; the economic results were noteworthy and the Cistercian abbeys had entered on a certain industrial activity. But the religious renaissance had not come, and could not come, from Benedictine monasticism. Others, however (chief among whom was Norbert), considered that the monks should leave the solitude of the cloister, where they were exclusively devoted to seeking their own personal sanctity, though it was more difficult to achieve it there than was once the case, and devote themselves to the care of souls; this meant taking the place of the secular priesthood.

In the ecclesiastical world new ways were being sought after; the religious attitude of the laity was agitated by various obscure disturbances. Some began to feel a sense of discontent with their daily life, an utter disgust with its material preoccupations, its monotonous and degrading round of pounds and pence; a painful sense of imperfect harmony with the Christian spirit tormented more than one soul. This sense of dissatisfaction was not dispelled by looking from the laity to the clergy; indeed, not infrequently it became more marked. In this way, on other and more spiritual grounds, these unquiet souls found themselves led into the same criticisms, complaints, and aspirations that were felt by the laity in their struggle with the ecclesiastical authority for lands and rights. The more spiritual way led them also more directly and more rapidly

in the direction of private religious assemblies, schism and heresy. They contemplated living the perfect life in accordance with their own personal lights, and instructing others, thus taking the place of their parish priests and bishops, who were deemed incompetent or patently unworthy, and had been proved hostile to any initiative from the laity. They referred directly to the Gospel, reading and interpreting it in secret gatherings, and translating it into the vulgar tongue for the illiterate. In this way the Waldensian movement arose, and spread from France to Lombardy, where it found the soil prepared and the seed sown; and the Poor Brothers of Lombardy (appropriately enough in those years of Francis' religious crisis) went further than the Poor Brothers of Lyons: they rejected the Roman Catholic clergy entirely and formed a wholly separate Church of their own.

Between the new reforming tendencies that rushed into schism and heresy, and the hierarchical orthodoxy, with its traditional customs, an intermediate zone had come into being, an evangelical reform party which remained within the Church or sought to enter it. Norbert of Xanten, before he founded the Premonstratensians, had been a wandering preacher and had practised complete evangelical poverty; but he had soon given it up, to become Abbot of Prémontré and finally Archbishop of Magdeburg. Francis was still revelling with the youth of Assisi, and was preparing himself for his trial of arms in the city wars, when a section of the Umiliati of Lombardy (included by Pope Lucius III, at the Council of Verona in 1184, with

the Poor Brothers of Lyons) formed orthodox religious communities and lay confraternities, which were approved by Pope Innocent in 1201. And while Francis, in his labours over San Damiano and the Porziuncola, was still seeking his vocation, an ex-Waldensian, Durando di Huesca, had already formed the Community of Poor Catholics, approved by the Pope in 1208; and soon afterwards, in 1210, another group of Waldensians, apparently Lombards, headed by a certain Bernardo Primo, were to follow his example. All these lived in poverty and worked for their own support; their mission was to preach, especially against heretics. One unusual occurrence is deserving of mention. In 1206 a Canon Regular and a Spanish bishop, who were attached to the mission sent into Languedoc against the Albigensians, had tried to reintroduce the apostolic ideal of preaching, in humility and poverty; and in this they had the encouragement and direction of the Pope. This Canon Regular was Domenico di Gusman, who a few years later was to found the order of Preachers. It was a last attempt, before the resort to armed repression, a momentary expedient, which failed and was abandoned; but Durando di Huesca had been converted by it.

A return to the Gospels, poverty, work, and apostolic preaching were in the air. It was still uncertain whether these ideas would take form within the Church of Rome, and purify and strengthen her, or outside and in opposition to her, and force their way in. And over all these aspirations and uncertainties hovered the breath of the Apocalypse, never more noticeable than in the Middle

Ages. If the world was corrupt, and if its corruption had penetrated into the Church, that meant that the end was near. Indeed, that breath had become articulate in the prophecies of the Abbot Gioacchino di Fiore, touching the kingdom of the Holy Spirit that was to follow that of the Son, just as the Son's kingdom had followed that of the Father; and in the monkish state which was to take the place of the priesthood.

It is not possible to say which of these influences, and to what extent, reached the solitary of San Damiano and the Porziuncola. The Poor Brothers of Lyons belonged to the period of his boyhood and youth. The Poor Lombard Brethren and the Poor Catholics were rather contemporaneous with his conversion than antecedent to it; and the latter never developed into anything more than a very small group. The Umiliati do not appear to have made much impression outside Lombardy. Not one of these movements seems to have passed the Po. Specific and direct influences are not likely, but the air was full of the perfume of evangelicism. Nevertheless, Francis' religious crisis was all his own. It was a profound change in his character, a complete *volte-face* in his point of view: a certain object that he had earnestly pursued in a certain direction appeared to him irreconcilable with that kind of life; and he was constrained to look for it in quite another kind of life, and, in the process, the content and meaning of that object changed entirely. He had sought the satisfaction and expansion of his personality in external grandeur and material power, among and over his fellow men. He had

subsequently come to understand the emptiness of such a satisfaction, but he retained his aspiration for some great achievement. In renunciation he had found peace and freedom; in bringing the word of God to his Christian brothers he was now to find the kind of expansion that his soul needed. His way of life could not remain an exclusively personal affair, simply for his own inner satisfaction and the salvation of his own soul. It was to become the means to a common and divine end. The progress of his spirit was long and hidden; the illumination was sudden and resplendent.

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On February 24, 1209, in the restored Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, a priest was saying Mass. It was St. Matthew's day, and spring was at hand. "By St. Matthew's day, the dove is on the way," says an old Umbrian proverb, still current today. As he was devoutly following Mass, Francis was suddenly struck by certain words of the evangelist. Christ had said to the Apostles: "Go and preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat." While the priest was reading, Francis had not been quite sure that he had understood everything, and when Mass was over, he went and got him to re-read and translate the Gospel text word by word.

"Here is what I was looking for, here is what I will do," he burst out when the reading was over. He leapt up, threw away his stick, put on an even coarser garment than the one he was wearing, stitched a cross into the front of it, and tied it round the middle with a cord. Purse and money he had none to throw away. And he began to preach to whomsoever he met.

At last he had received his vocation from heaven, the divine revelation that he had awaited so long. He had already attained absolute poverty; he already practised the rule of living by the labour of his own hands from day to day, and not on money saved. But now he knew for certain that this was the way in which Christ desired His earliest and truest followers to live; and the one that he had found and followed for himself suddenly seemed to him sanctified and divine.

His repugnance to money, which had grown in his heart as the years went on, and had become an implacable hatred as the result of his father's obstinate avarice, now declared itself as a profound conviction that money is the first obstacle in the way of following and imitating Christ. And the desire for liberty that had driven him to abandon everything and everybody and wander about as he pleased now became the providential means by which, like Christ and His Apostles, he had borne within himself the love of God. In this way his vagrant poverty was not the mere caprice of a rebel against ordinary existence, nor was it an exercise in ascetic mortification inspired by the fear of hell; it was an essential means for the reproduction of the

life of Christ, for the celebration of the will of God on earth and the advent of His kingdom. Poverty became the height of wealth, and renunciation the supreme victory. The ardent, full life, an outlet for all the spiritual energies that had for so long a time been surging darkly within him, was at last found. He would, by living the life of the Gospel, bring back the kingdom of God upon earth: this was the task for which God had destined him.

Until that time, the Gospel of St. Matthew, for so many who had read and listened to it, had been but part of the liturgy, to be recited at Mass on a given day in the year. The mission of Christ to the Apostles was, for them, a matter of history: it was an event that had taken place so many centuries ago, in a far country. The event was providential and divine; but notwithstanding that, or just because of it, it was completed and done with, and stood in no relation to the ordinary life of today. And yet here was this fragment of the liturgy coming back as a living message in the consciousness of the one-time Umbrian merchant; this past event was for him present reality and future action. Christ's words had not been said once and for all to the twelve fishermen of Galilee: they were full of meaning for the men of today – for those who felt the need of fulfilling them. The Gospel had not been preached once and for all; it must be preached again now and every day, because men had need of it now, and now more than ever. The apostolic office had not been abolished; there was a place for it today and a need for it. And the prerequisite for apostolic preaching was the one laid down

by Jesus: absolute poverty – renunciation, that is to say, of all acquisition and accumulation of money, because "a man cannot serve two masters." A renunciation that meant freedom from every moral and material hindrance, complete freedom for apostolic activity, a serene and secure cheerfulness in which to listen to the divine message and repeat it to the brethren.

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The churches to be restored were by this time finished. But Francis had now a new occupation, one that he would never have thought of before. When he left the church, he quickly climbed the hill to Assisi. The hermit had been transformed into a missionary, the penitent into a prophet. He no longer shunned human kind, he went in search of them.

He began to preach on the Piazzetta di San Giorgio (the Piazza Santa Chiara of today). The place was familiar to Francis from the time of his boyhood, when he went to school. It has a peaceful, almost secluded air, and the view from it was particularly quiet, serene, and lovely. The green plain, cradled round by the grey slopes of olives and the rounded blue hills, seems bathed in enchantment. Looking upwards, one sees the belfry of the cathedral outlined against the sky, tall and menacing, backed by the dismantled masses of the long walls and towers of the citadel. All Assisi and its very soul is summed up in that vista.

Wandering preachers, discoursing as the spirit moved

them in the public streets and squares, were not at that time an uncommon spectacle, as they are in the Anglo-Saxon world of today. To say Mass and administer the sacraments was the business of the priest: to preach the word of God, on the other hand, was not, in popular opinion, unbecoming in a layman. The clergy did little preaching; it was, in general, confined to the bishops, and there were bishops who not merely did not preach, but did not say Mass very many times in the year. The ecclesiastical authorities were on their guard against unauthorized preachers of this kind, especially after their experience of the Waldensian movement, and the Council of Verona had expressly forbidden anyone to preach, under pain of excommunication, unless authorized by the bishop. This could not, however, prevent a new preacher from coming forward, nor the people from flocking to hear him: the intervention of the ecclesiastical authorities came afterwards, if at all, and suppressed his activities.

The Assisans were eager to listen to Pietro Bernardoni's son. From the day of his rupture with his father in the presence of the Bishop, public opinion had been inclined to be favourable to him. The people looked on him as one who had sacrificed everything for the love of God, from a feeling of generous indignation at his father's avarice; and thenceforward he had lived in poverty and piety, getting his daily bread by public charity in return for his labour in restoring churches and chapels. To the humbler citizens especially, who, excluded as they were from political life, and existing on the crumbs that fell

from the loaded tables of the prosperous bourgeoisie, found their only wealth in the Church and in God, Francis, the Little Poor Man, was already a well-known and much loved figure.

His audience became more numerous and attentive when people discovered that he was no ordinary preacher. His were no dry, involved, yet gabbled discourses, as of a man disposing of a tedious obligation. He spoke out of the fullness of his heart, and with the authority of one inspired, as if carrying out a mission entrusted to him by God, to him and him alone. His speech was ardent and impetuous, accompanied by vivid and spontaneous gestures. At times, at his more exalted moments, his body fell naturally into a succession of rhythmical movements, almost like those of a dance; the harmonious sonority of his utterance dropped ultimately into song, and the common Italian speech was combined with and finally replaced by French; and his need of music was, at certain moments, so strong in him that, having no instrument with which to accompany himself, with the make-believe of a child he would lay a piece of wood against his left shoulder like a violin and scrape across it a bow of the same material. The sound of his own singing and his imaginary music would carry him off into an ecstasy, from which he emerged only with an outburst of tears, to the amazement of the spectators. They felt God's jester was before them.

Thus, in his moments of exaltation, Francis fell into song and dance and music, by a natural impulse of the spirit, not as the result of a premeditated oratorical effect.

Indeed, there was nothing of the professional orator about him. The intonation of his voice was simple and spontaneous; he did not preach, he conversed. He involved himself in no complicated reasoning, nor did he proceed by means of artificial distinctions, as is the custom of orators who are concerned to develop a given theme, on which, but for their professional obligation, they would have had nothing to say. He said, simply and directly, what came into his mind and he knew how to express the deepest matters in clear and incisive terms. His hearers drank up his words as if they had been an intoxicating draught, and, once he had finished his discourse, it would have been impossible for him to repeat it. His words came freely from the inspiration of the moment and could not be reproduced or imitated.

In consequence of their character of inspired improvisation, neither Francis nor anyone else wrote down any of his sermons. But he himself has preserved a record of their substance. "Fear and honour, praise and bless, thank and adore, the Lord God Omnipotent, in the Trinity and Unity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all things. Repent; and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, because you know that you shall quickly die. Give and it shall be given unto you. Forgive and you shall be forgiven. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you your sins. Confess all your sins. Blessed are all those that are moved to repentance, because they shall go to the kingdom of heaven; beware of those that are not moved to repentance, because they shall become children of the

Devil, whose works they have done, and they shall go to eternal fire. Keep yourselves from all evil and persevere in that which is good until the end." They were the ordinary themes of Christian preaching and for the most part were in the words of the Gospels. But that very fact, which meant a return to the original sources, gave them an advantage over the scholastic artificialities of the professional preachers. And this advantage was emphasized by their spontaneous and original, simple and yet effective style. His admonitions did not stop at dry precepts, they were embodied in parables and instances, anecdotes and apologues. The word of the Gospel lived once more in his direct and vivid references to the conditions of the time and to the experiences of his hearers. Francis preached no dogma, because he assumed his hearers to possess the same simple, concrete faith as his own; and he was quite unacquainted with theology. His preaching was moral: the morality of the Gospel as applied to his own contemporaries and his own times.

The commonest themes were penitence and the forgiveness of sins. Penitence meant repentance for sin, reparation for injuries, more especially (in that world of increasingly intense economic activity) restitution of ill-gotten gains, and, in general, a change of life. There was no question of a man's giving up his profession and withdrawing from the world, but of obedience to God's commandments in the course of daily life. The change was moral. Death was, sooner or later, the certain fate of all; we must be careful not to be overtaken by the judgment

of God. Francis described, with popular simplicity, the greedy and rapacious rich man who, when dangerously ill, wishes to save his soul. The priest invites him to restore such part of his possessions as he has acquired unjustly. But the sick man has already made a will, his relations are expecting, as of right, the entire inheritance: and he tells the priest that he cannot make restitution. His sickness increases upon him and he can no longer speak; he dies and the Devil carries off his soul. Francis' description was vivid and effective, and every hearer could put some name to it. Behind the death and destiny of individuals there could sometimes be seen, in his words, the shadow of the end of the world and the universal judgment. But he was not at home in apocalyptic prophecies and visions: he insisted on the moral conversion that was essential if a man was to enter the kingdom of God, and he preferred to depict the blessedness of that kingdom.

The theme of forgiveness arose from that of penitence; its aim is reconciliation with God, and the grant of His forgiveness; for Francis, only God's forgiveness, and not any personal justification, could effect this reconciliation. But God will not forgive anyone who has not previously forgiven his neighbour. Thus he arrived at the mutual forgiveness of offences, at Christian reconciliation between brothers; and thus the object of Francis' preaching proved likewise his starting-point. For this reason he never began to preach without saying to his hearers: "God give you peace." It is an expression which today might appear a banal formula on the lips of a preacher; but it was not so

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then. It was a personal innovation of Francis, and was considered to be, like his vocation, divinely inspired. That belief was the central conviction of Francis, the very sense and meaning of his mission.

Thus the Umbrian prophet answered to a need of the time. Shortly before, a strange vagrant had been seen wandering about the streets of Assisi, crying out from time to time: "Peace and goodwill be with you." Assisi, like all Italy at that time from the Alps to the Kingdom of Naples, was passing through a period of radical transformation; and this process meant, as it always does in life, struggle and tribulation. First had come the wars of the communes (truly so called, being unions of all classes of citizens) against powers outside, near at hand and far away, feudal overlords, other communes, and the Empire. When the communes had established their position, there followed a period of internal struggle between the nobility who had, at first, played an effective and indeed authoritative part in the municipalities, and the bourgeoisie, who, now more numerous and flourishing, aspired to equality and even to preponderance. Moreover, the political struggle was complicated by the social one: the displacement and concentration of wealth, enfranchisement and confiscation, the gradual supersession of the simpler economic relations of the past by the influence of money, the increasing importance of industry and commerce as compared with agrarian pursuits, the earlier uprisings of the lower classes of labourers and small artisans against tyrannical masters and rapacious merchants. And, to complete the

picture, it need hardly be said that there were constant struggles between the civil and religious authorities: conflicts over jurisdiction, disputes over rights of ownership, and rivalry in matters of precedence. Brawls and skirmishes, punitive expeditions dispatched by the commune, and private vendettas were all in the order of the day. These struggles were inevitable and necessary, and, for that reason, to some extent beneficial. The political and economic organization of the young Italian people grew more robust; the relics of the past were eliminated, the out-of-date institutions disappeared, and the new life began to flourish and grow more luxuriant. But all this turmoil gave rise to a great deal of individual suffering, which was especially acute and common among the weaker members of the community, who got but little profit from the general progress. This was most notably the case among the lower classes, who had no part in the municipal government and were unaffected by the liberation of the estates from their feudal burdens, or by the accumulation of capital in successful trade, or by profitable usury; what fell to their share was the increased cost of living, the damage and ruin caused by wars both domestic and foreign, which involved stoppage of work and material loss, and, as often as not, wounds, disease, and death.

Together with the lower orders in the city, and in certain respects even more than they, the country people felt the need of peace. It the movement for the enfranchisement of the land both from its feudal burdens and from the clutches of the landlords was to their advantage, none the

less the breaking up of certain large estates and the transfer and sudden redistribution of properties were not always without inconvenience, loss, and injury to the labourers. But it was above all the wars between city and city, or between the city and the country landlords, that brought suffering upon the peasants. The walled cities had little to fear. It was seldom now that a city was captured, sacked, burnt, and destroyed, though this was not uncommon in the earlier and more bitter hostilities between the greater and lesser communes, and in the imperial wars carried on, as they were, on a grander scale. The ordinary wars at this time (they were so frequent that the phrase is permissible) were little more than raids; and the essence of these raids was the devastation of the country-side: crops trampled down, trees stripped and burnt, vines torn up, and cattle carried off. Even the tenant farmers had to make allowances for these calamities, though in their case they were less frequent and less burdensome. For the poor peasant, tied to his plot of land and his humble cabin, exposed to every attack, the word "peace" must have possessed all the radiant splendour of paradise on earth.

In this way, among the lower orders in the city and in the country, who up till then had been particularly accessible to heretical propaganda, the preaching of "Brother Francis" awoke an immediate and widespread response. The harder part of his message concerned others rather than them. Their dark and difficult daily life was little open to criticism, and they were very ready for flights of fancy towards that kingdom of God which ap-

peared in far-off splendour, in the words of the preacher. They had no ties of solid and tangible interests to restrain the impulse of their feelings. But behind those who found in the Apostle's message the answer to their natural and spontaneous desires came the others to whom it implied rebuke and called for sacrifices; and the conquest of these latter was the truer measure of his success. The change of life invoked by Brother Francis, the "penance" of which he spoke, could mean to the poor man of the city and the labourer in the fields (whose lives were already a penance in themselves, in the common meaning of the word) only the resigned or glad acceptance of their daily burden. It was the rich and greedy merchants, the luxurious and tyrannical nobles – it was they, above all, who had to change their lives; to restore their ill-gotten gains, to abstain from usury and oppression, and to become reconciled to their rivals and their enemies. But in them, too, under the hard integument of interest and habit, was to be found the human being, the religious animal. And in them too the preaching of Francis found an echo; indeed, the first apostles of the revived Christian life came from these higher social levels.

Justice and goodness, gentleness of heart and uprightness of character were not wanting among the upper classes. Indeed, in Francis' own time there had been examples like Acerbo Morena, Governor of Dodi, who had died forty years previously of the plague that had destroyed Barbarossa's army at Rome, leaving behind him a record that was little less than saintly. Belonging to the nobility

of the robe, eloquent and learned, he feared God above all things, gave thanks to him, and made offering of the tenth part of his fortune and the first-fruits of his harvests to the priests of God. He always spoke the truth and blushed if he heard a lie. He served with the army in time of war; but he declined to make use of anything that had been taken by force, and he forbade his servants to lay their hands upon any spoil, while all the bishops and the counts in the neighbourhood were in the habit of living on the property of others even more than on their own. A soldier and a noble, he lived the life of a monk. An uncommon type indeed, but not unique; and in Umbria and at Assisi, less spoiled by the struggles of the time, and less absorbed in the whirlpool of the new wealth, it was likely to be more frequently found than elsewhere. On such spirits, who lived in the world as if they were outside it, the words of Brother Francis must have fallen like spring rain on ploughed land, sheltered from the snows of winter.

CHAPTER SIX

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THE POOR BROTHERS OF ASSISI

IN HIS SERMONS FRANCIS DID NOT ASK ANYONE TO FOLLOW his example. He had reduced himself to poverty like that of Christ in order to be able, like Him, to preach repentance to mankind. He was the apostle, and the others who crowded so eagerly round him, or those whom he himself sought out, were his disciples present and to come. But it was natural that, in addition to his words, his life and person should arouse the enthusiasm of the multitudes and emulation in some few. In his case, preaching and preacher were hardly to be kept apart. The distinction was a natural one and indeed had become a matter of common acceptance so far as the professional preachers were concerned – that is, the clergy in the exercise of their pastoral ministrations. It did not occur to anyone who heard the Gospel expounded in church to become a priest or a monk; he was more likely to remember the adage: "Mind what the priest says, not what he does." But here the case was quite different. A private citizen, a layman, had taken suddenly to preaching the Gospel in the streets and squares because he believed that the Almighty had commanded him so to do; and at the same time he led the life of a saint. The words and the life of the preacher seemed closely united; and the former had so great an effect on his hearers as a result, mainly, of the latter. His exceptionally

saintly life rendered his words exceptionally effective. And those who were most deeply struck by his words were doubtless inspired to try and imitate his life.

There was in Assisi a rich citizen of the middle class, by name Bernardo, who had become deeply attached to Brother Francis. Brother Francis really did live as Christ had done: he was poorer than the birds of the air, for he had no table at which to sit and eat, nor did he possess a pillow on which to lay his head at night. He depended for everything on the charity of the passers-by. Bernardo often gave the poor preacher shelter in his house, which was on the right-hand side of the steep approach to the temple of Minerva, opposite the new Piazza Maggiore. When Francis passed the night with him, he slept in the same room as the master of the house: at that time bedrooms were not numerous even in the houses of the well-to-do, and this was the best way of showing true hospitality. Thus, on more than one occasion, Bernardo had watched and admired Francis as he passed the greater part of the night in prayer and in murmuring praises to God. Hence the idea of Francis' sanctity began to impress itself on his mind and he, too, gradually felt the need of living a life of perfection. One evening he asked Francis' advice as to what he should do and, above all, how he should dispose of his wealth.

Francis knew that the reading of the Gospel had revealed to him the new life; and he advised Bernardo to go and do likewise. Early in the morning (it was the middle of April, less than two months after the vision on the Por-

ziuncola) they made their way to the nearest church, which was San Nicola, on the site of the present *carabinieri* barracks, at the far end of the Piazza Maggiore, between the Via di Portica, which climbed steeply up towards the city wall, and the Via San Giacomo, which led by many devious turnings towards the gate of that name, over against the valley of the Tescio.

They went in and prayed, asked the priest for the Gospels, and on opening them read the following passages: "*If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give it to the poor*"; and "*take nothing for your journey*"; and "*If any man will come after me let him deny himself.*" The rule of life for Brother Bernardo was found, and it was the same that Father Francis had followed on his own account. At the same time, or nearly so, Pietro Cattani, an even more important personage, at any rate so far as social position went, came to join Francis. He was a Doctor of Law and a canon of San Rufino, but was not a priest on that account. Out of respect for his rank, Francis was in the habit of addressing him as "Signor Pietro." But Signor Pietro did not stand on his dignity; he was gentle and affectionate, and always venerated Francis like a father.

Francis had not sought followers; but he was glad when he saw God had given him companions. He began to realize that he needed them, and not only to help him in his preaching. It was in his heart, above all, that he felt the need of brothers in exchange for the family that he had had to give up to follow God's voice. The three of them formed a little community: the "Poor Brothers of Assisi."

Their rule of life was laid down for them in the texts from the Gospels that they had read in the Porziuncola and San Nicola. They had been guided to these passages by God's will, and the way of life for Francis and his companions had thus been divinely revealed. But in addition to these there was a further manifestation of the divine intentions that had to be taken into account: the care of the lepers, among whom Francis had taken the first decisive step in the way of conversion. Thus the life of apostolic poverty was a form filled with a dual content – the message of repentance and peace, and works of charity among the most miserable and desolate of their brothers in Christ. The community of the "Poor Brothers of Assisi" were to live by the work of their hands just as Christ and His Apostles had worked and continued to work even during their periods of preaching, and in accordance with the words of St. Paul: "If any would not work neither should he eat." In cases of necessity they had recourse to alms. The headquarters of the little army was an abandoned hut belonging to the lepers' hospital, a little to the east of the Porziuncola, in a place called Rivotorto; and the cathedral of the community was of course the Chapel of Santa Maria.

On the morning of April 23, 1209 (about a week after the reading of the Gospel in San Nicola) another recruit from Assisi made his way to those headquarters and that cathedral, by name Egidio. He was a simple, ignorant man, but upright by nature and with a profound fear of God. Even before Francis had entered upon his mission, he had gone about meditating on what way of life

might be most pleasing to the Lord. The example of Francis had given him the answer. When he had made up his mind, he went that very day to pray in the Church of San Giorgio, whose feast-day it happened to be; then he went in search of Francis along the hill-side, which was already green and gay with spring flowers. Francis was equally early abroad and he met him returning from the wood of the Porziuncola where he had preferred to pray in the open air, among the songs of the birds. Egidio knelt down before him and begged him to receive him into his society. Francis said: "Dear brother, God has indeed favoured you. If the Emperor came to Assisi" (Otto IV was, in fact, to pass through the city on his way to his coronation at Rome, and the knightly simile came readily to Francis' imagination) "and wished to take a man of this city as his personal body-guard and attendant, whoever was chosen would be mightily pleased. How much more pleased should you be that God has chosen you as His soldier and beloved servant." Brother Francis looked on his society as a military Order, and the highest of all, because it was recruited by God Himself for His service. They were the paladins of Christ, successors of those of King Arthur.

He raised Egidio to his feet and took him to the hut, where they found Bernardo, to whom Francis said: "God has sent you a worthy brother." And, rejoicing in the Lord, they ate together. Then Francis and Egidio set out for Assisi to provide the new recruit with a habit to wear. The most important part of Egidio's lay apparel, his cloak, had been suddenly bestowed by the way-side on a poor woman who

had asked for alms. " Give me your mantle, dear brother," said Francis to Egidio, after having thought for a little what they could give. Egidio felt as though he had touched heaven.

As the community prospered, visibly favoured by God, Francis thought it was time to extend the scope of his apostolic mission. He gathered his three companions about him in the wood, and said that God had called them, not for themselves alone, but for the salvation of many; and that they must therefore go forth into the world and exhort their fellow men by their words and their example to repent and remember God's commandments, which they had forgotten. And taking the latest arrival as his companion, he set forth into the March of Ancona, while the other two went in an opposite direction. Francis and Egidio made a rapid journey through the March, which is the part of Italy most like Umbria in spirit and in form. The former marched along singing praises to the Lord, as was his wont, in the French language. And when they met with anyone, he would fall to preaching. Egidio contented himself with observing, when the other had finished: " What he says is quite right; believe him."

When the four of them returned, others came to join them, and their number was increased to seven. It was a community of a novel kind, entirely spiritual; there were no monastery buildings to keep them together, nor any rule which subjected them to a uniform and compulsory way of life. The cabin of Rivotorto was a refuge, a meeting-place, and no more; and the Chapel of Santa Maria

they had chosen freely as their place of prayer, nor was it specially their own. Each and all of them did as the Spirit bade them and went where the Spirit guided them. And yet their very way of life and their spontaneous obedience to Francis gave rise to a certain uniformity. They prayed in Santa Maria or in the wood, they worked in the fields or houses, wherever their labour was needed and accepted, and received food in exchange for it; they cared for the lepers; they begged for alms for themselves and for each other, when they could earn nothing or not enough; they used the salutation "God give you peace," and they talked of the laws of God and of repentance. This form of salutation was quite new and some were astonished and even offended at it; so that, at first, some of the Brothers were reluctant to use it. It was harder still to get accustomed to the service of the lepers; but this for Francis was an essential matter, and he at once put it before everyone who presented himself to join the community. The revolt of the senses involved in this duty was exceeded by the revolt of the spirit against begging for alms. This was the most difficult point. As first their father Francis, who was full of sympathy and understood what a dreadful ordeal it was to them, preferred to go alone; but later on he bade them take courage, and addressed them in one of those brief and penetrating discourses that left them not a word to say. It was not for them to be ashamed of asking alms: before them Jesus and the Madonna and the Apostles had lived upon charity. This was the Lord's legacy to His own: when they asked it, they were not asking for other people's

property, but for what the Lord had assigned to them as their own. God had created all things for men's use, and had given them out of charity to the worthy and the unworthy alike. The discourse was marvellously effective: they all went forth and vied with each other as to who should bring back the most.

They were few, solitary, and ragged. They could look for no assistance, they had no authority behind them to advise and encourage them. Moments of uncertainty and doubt were not lacking. How would they manage to live? What was the purpose of their sacrifice? Francis himself went through some moments of discouragement and disillusion. But he emerged from them with renewed and stronger confidence in the divine grace; and he comforted his little flock with large and splendid visions of the future, in which the natural inclinations of his mind found peace and satisfaction, because they now seemed sanctified by God. They were few, in an obscure corner of the Umbrian country-side; but they would grow in numbers and spread at last to the ends of the earth. Nobles and great personages would come to them thinking it an honour to beg for alms in their company; French and Spaniards, English and Germans would join their company. And at last there would be too many; and they would be like the fisherman who, when he flung his net into the sea, drew forth so many fish of all kinds, and took the best, and threw back the others whence they came.

In order to make themselves worthy of God's grace they must take up once more and extend their missionary

work. They must set out in all directions, following in every particular their Lord's example, when he had enjoined on His Apostles to go forth two by two, announce the coming of the kingdom of God, heal the sick and cleanse the lepers. Just at this time they were joined by an eighth: and they were then able to go out in pairs into the four corners of the world. Francis summoned them and announced his decision: " Go and preach peace and repentance for the remission of sins. Bear your tribulations patiently; that which God has promised and decreed, he will not fail to carry out. If any man ask you who you are, answer humbly; if any persecute you, give them your blessing; if any abuse and slander you, give them your thanks; it is for such things as these that the kingdom of heaven is made ready for us."

One by one they all knelt down before their father, who embraced them and spoke the words of farewell: " Rest your faith in the Lord, and he will uphold you."

Then they departed two by two, including Francis, towards the four cardinal points, which were to them like the four arms of a cross stretching out from the little Church of Santa Maria, which had become the new centre of the world, whence it would once again be conquered for Christ. At least two of them, Bernardo and Egidio, set out with the intention of actually reaching the farthest point in the west, the shrine of St. James of Compostella. In their ingenuous enthusiasm they believed they were going forth to conquer the whole world for their faith, on this single apostolic journey. Francis' youthful ardour, which was not without a touch of arrogance, was restrained by his sense of

chivalrous heroism, his love of unexpected adventures, and random wanderings: these were all characteristics with which he had imbued his companions, or rather which they already possessed, though somewhat less actively, and which had drawn them to him.

The first campaigns in the conquest of the world were delightful. Since their travels in the March, several weeks had passed and it was now the height of summer. The long days allowed them many hours of travel, even with the indispensable rests. The white roads stretched away before them into the infinite, through the green meadows, and seemed to invite them to fare forward for ever; paths on which the snow had not melted climbed up the mountain-side. Unencumbered by their simple habits, through which the cold no longer found its way, the Poor Brothers of Assisi went forward sometimes singing songs and canticles, and sometimes praying and conversing in low tones; and each pair thought where the others might be at that moment and what they had done. In the noonday heat rest was easy and pleasant in the shadow of the oaks, which grew everywhere and were then more abundant on the Umbrian plain than they are today. They saluted the passers-by with their inspired greeting: "God give you peace," and the Umbrian peasants, who had grown used to the pious salutation, answered warmly and made them welcome. Wherever they stopped, they took a hand in whatever work might be going forward; then they preached the word of God and then sat down to eat, before going on their way once more. When the summer evening fell, any refuge would do for them to

sleep in, even a cabin in the fields. They even chanced to fall asleep in weariness at the road-side and found on awakening that a charitable passer-by had left them a loaf of bread as a gift. Harder, but much more full of good works and true joy, were their sojourns among the lepers; their father's orders were explicit, and they were the orders of Christ Himself to His Apostles, for that mission, two by two, which they were now repeating: " Cleanse the lepers." Fortunately, fresh running water was to be had in abundance.

Gradually, however, as they got farther away from the Umbrian country, where they were already known as servants of God, inoffensive, and charitable, and men of goodwill, their welcome changed, and in spite of all their enthusiasm the difficulties of their enterprise began to become apparent; the more so when they passed from the countryside and villages into the cities. There they were not known, and they were regarded as vagabonds and objects of suspicion. In that world in which organized labour had developed so enormously and assumed such capital importance, the most creditable judgment of them, at first sight, was that they were unemployed; and the assumption immediately following was that they were idle and unemployable. Their protests that they were ready to work were not taken seriously in the cities: what was their work, their trade? And why had they given it up? And when, in place of their useless and inopportune offers to work, they asked for alms, they were plainly convicted, and sentence was pronounced. Now more than ever their salutation of peace

sounded new and strange, and almost insulting in its claims. People merely shrugged their shoulders at their exhortations to repentance: there were plenty of preachers in the churches, and too often they knew well enough what to think of them. They were subjected to inquiries prompted by a distrustful and hostile curiosity; who were they, whence had they come, and what did they want? They could only reply that they were penitents, and came from Assisi. Neither their calling nor their place of origin greatly impressed these weighty and respectable burgesses. The majority ignored them; some made a mock of them and amused themselves by pushing them about and pulling at their hoods; and some went so far as to pelt them with dirt and stones. A few pious spirits listened to them, at least for a little. But it was difficult to come by even the minimum of nourishment, and even more so to find a lodging. People were diffident about giving shelter to such vagabonds, who would certainly try to rob their hosts. Women were especially afraid of them, and took them for madmen or wizards rather than robbers, and feared sorcery and the evil eye. Thus starvation, nights in the open air, abuse, and even blows fell to the lot of the new apostles in the second part of their journey. If they were not arrested out of hand and sent back under close guard to Assisi, they owed it to the fact that they did not live in the highly concentrated and controlled organization of a modern State. But the Little Brothers had tough shoulders and stout hearts. Their spiritual warmth was able to endure the icy cold of the world of cities. If they found no charity, they were ever ready with

their own: in Lombardy Brother Egidio gave away his hood (he had no other) and went about bare-headed for several days. Abuse and suffering were all in the day's work: their father Francis had prepared them for it and he had but repeated Christ's message to the Apostles. Their hard lot did not produce disillusion; indeed, it rather served to confirm their faith in Francis, and to provide a more exact imitation of their divine exemplar. It did, however, induce them not to protract their journey indefinitely, and to abate a little of their schemes for the conquest of the world; moreover, each pair felt the deepest longing to see their companions once again. So they turned back, and foregathered at almost exactly the same moment at their headquarters, so much so that they thought it a miracle from God. When they were all together once more, after so many various fortunes, in the company of their father Francis, at Rivotorto and in the little Church of Santa Maria, their joy was great. They told their stories with sincerity and simplicity and asked Francis' pardon for what they had done amiss or with insufficient zeal. Their successes became exaggerated in their imagination; they did not remember their failures except as welcome and necessary tests, the crown of happiness.

They took up once more their old quiet, brotherly life, between the hut at Rivotorto and the Chapel of Santa Maria. The time that was not apportioned to rest and prayer they spent in work: they worked harder than they needed (for their wants were small and they were adequately provided for by charity), but they aimed at carrying out in full the life of the Gospel and avoiding idleness, the enemy of all

men's souls, but especially of the souls of the religious, in whom it evokes the fumes of pride and sensual imaginings, and also because to them work was an honourable and a pleasant task. They lived in the world and yet outside it: in constant contact with their fellow-citizens of Assisi and the country round, in their work, in the collection of alms, and in preaching the word of God; yet all the time they stood apart, a compact little community, voluntary and bound by no rule. They were deeply attached to each other; each of them would have given his life for his fellows, with hardly a thought. One day a madman began to throw stones at one of them, and his Brother who was with him immediately placed himself in front of his companion, at the risk of being stoned to death himself. Their understanding was complete and their discipline perfect, precisely because none of them ever thought of imposing it. Each one looked upon his fellow as his father and his master, and was ever ready to obey him or, in other words, to do his will. If any trifling dispute arose, or if any of them had let fall an unkind word, they could not rest until they had been reconciled, and the offender asked the other, by way of expiation, to place his foot upon the erring mouth.

Francis was the father and the master of them all, and less than any of them did he find it necessary to issue orders. On the contrary, he watched over the safety and happiness of all his sons, and was careful lest they might take injury from a misplaced zeal. He would not allow excessive austerities; he practised them somewhat freely himself, because he thought them necessary to subdue his

senses, which were still at times unduly active; but he was more considerate to his brothers than to himself. It chanced one night that one of the penitents, who had fasted too long, felt that he was going to faint and cried out: "Brothers, I am dying of hunger." Francis jumped up at once and had the table spread with the best they had; and to make sure that his little son should not feel any constraint at eating, he himself sat down to table beside him and called all the other Brothers to come and do the same. And when the meal was over, he admonished them all to do nothing in excess: it was the same sin, he said, to eat too much and to eat less than was necessary.

The apparent failure of the apostolic mission to the four points of the compass had not diminished the joy and confidence of the community or the attraction that it exercised over many minds. Indeed, the story of their adventures possibly increased that attraction for some. Hardly had they returned when four other recruits came to join them; and the arrival of each of them was a feast-day in the hut at Rivotorto. One of the four was a noble from Rieti, Angelo Tancredi by name. The fame and influence of the penitents of Assisi began to spread far beyond the limits of their city.

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These conversions made a great stir in Assisi; they were the subject of endless stories and comments wherever people gathered together, in their own homes and in the streets. The *vox populi,* which in this case was more than ever the *vox*

Dei, praised and applauded. The opinions and judgments of individuals were not always equally favourable. The kind of life led by the Poor Brothers of Assisi was the most unusual that could be imagined in a society that was then entirely organized in classes, guilds, and hierarchies. They were neither laymen nor religious: they did not belong to the secular clergy, nor did they form part of an already existing religious order, nor could they claim to have founded a new one. They acknowledged no rule, and possessed no habitation; unlike all religious orders they had no common property with which to provide for their support. They did not live the life of closed monastics or of cœnobites, or of hermits in solitary caves. On the contrary, they moved about the world at large, through the cities and the countryside, but without any fixed abiding-place, without a regular profession, and without any bonds to connect them with any constituted and recognized social organization. They obeyed no one; and, equally, no one was in a position to be responsible for them and to protect them.

Their opinions and their preaching were not, as may be imagined, less unusual, odd, and in conflict with the habits and opinions generally received, and of indisputable respectability. In a world in which every city and almost every town had assumed a personality of which it was jealous and proud, guarded its privileges, and was deeply concerned with its own aggrandizement, these people took not the slightest interest in public affairs: communes and feudal lords, nobles and people, had no existence for them. All men, of whatever city and whatever class, were equal

and indistinguishable in their eyes. Their only concern was to urge upon all men alike peace, the Gospel of Christ, and brotherly love. At that very moment Assisi was seething with internal quarrels, already begun in years gone by in the struggles between the communes and the feudal lords. Now it was the "*Majores*" and the "*Minores*" that were at war: on the one side were the nobles that had guided the original formation of the Commune, supported naturally enough by the feudal lords who had been conquered and subdued, and received into the city, and by certain elements of the higher bourgeoisie; on the other side, the mass of the solid middle class, who wanted a larger part in public life and represented the interests of the new industrial and commercial classes. Power and money were the two motive forces of the age: but Francis and his fellows not only did not seek power and money, but regarded them as worthless and contemptible. Francis said that a man should serve other men as though they were his brothers rather than try to gain authority over them; he recognized no feelings but those of charity, persuasion, and forgiveness; rights and force, the foundations of power, meant nothing to him. In his eyes and those of his followers money was dust upon the way-side – "asses' dung"; and, in consequence, the process of acquiring and accumulating it, as everyone did, or, at any rate, wanted to do, was equally rejected and condemned. It was impossible to make a more direct attack on all the profoundest opinions and feelings of contemporary society; at least, of "good society."

But besides this collective attack each and every

member of the community struck a blow on his own account. The eleven who had joined Francis, and the others that came later, had, all of them, or nearly all of them, families, relatives, and belongings. Fathers abandoned by their sons, relatives defeated of their hopes of inheritance by the distribution of goods among the poor, business losses consequent upon the defection of principals or their assistants (as had happened in the case of Pietro Bernardoni), all these together made a formidable indictment of grievances and injuries. And it was increased by the apprehension of those who, though they had not been affected today, were afraid they might be so tomorrow, when they observed the morbid attraction exercised by the Poor Brothers of Assisi, and their growing numbers. Though their popularity in the country was untouched, the cities began to turn against them. The relatives of the new apostles led the chorus of recrimination and abuse; and they were joined by a good many right-minded people, who thought it senseless and discreditable to go about asking alms from door to door, and poured contempt on such mendicants who had given away their own property and then asked others to support them.

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Bishop Guido was naturally interested in the vicissitudes of the penitents. They owed no special allegiance to ecclesiastical authority, but that fact increased rather than diminished his concern in their affairs. On that winter day of 1207, already so far distant, on a sudden spontaneous impulse he had opened his arms to Francis; he had received

him kindly on the few occasions when the latter had come to see him; and he had followed with a curiosity half admiring and half distrustful their first missions and their first successes. He now began to feel that harm might come of the movement and that its consequences might fall on himself, especially in so far as the communal authorities were concerned, for they were none too considerate of the episcopal power and privileges, which it was his duty, on his part, to defend tenaciously against all attacks. He summoned Francis to his presence one day to ask him to reflect on the difficulty of the way of life that he and his companions had chosen – to go about the world possessing nothing. But Francis answered: "My Lord, the moment we owned any property, we should also need arms to defend it. Then would follow disputes and lawsuits, and much hindrance to the love of God and our neighbour. Therefore we would own nothing."

Property means rights: rights mean fights, either sword in hand in battle, or before the tribunals with the weapons of the law. In the eyes of Francis there was little or no difference between the two kinds of contest, because both of them transgressed against the love of God and of our neighbour. Love and legal rights, charity and property, seemed to him irreconcilable; so he chose the former and left the latter to those who felt an inclination for them. He blamed no one for feeling in this way; he only asked that he should not be obliged to do so. Poverty for him was not simply a material reproduction of the life of Christ, a simple means to spiritual and physical freedom, so that he

could preach the word of God wherever the Spirit moved him. It was also, and more particularly, an essential condition of pure and perfect love, without strife and without ulterior ends. Poverty, in their missionary program, was accompanied by non-resistance to evil. His own work and that of his followers were not based upon the material means of wealth and were not to overcome hostility with the material means of force. On this account it was essential that they should possess no property, and that they should be ready to give up even the hut at Rivotorto, and to allow even their ragged tunics and the crust of bread that they had begged to be taken away from them. Nor were they to appeal to anyone for protection. Francis had begun the work himself and had not turned to any organized authority for help. Whoever decided to listen to him and follow him must do so entirely from his inner conviction; only his words, inspired by God, and rendered effective by God's grace, must influence them.

Francis had not the slightest intention of changing his way of life. His simple belief, firm as a rock, which had been revealed to him by God, was now accompanied by an increasing faith in a great mission entrusted to him by the divine will, for the good of the world. Men's hearts were full of wickedness, and God's law had been forgotten even by those who should have been the first to bear it in mind. Perhaps the last days were at hand. God had sent him, Francis, and his companions to awaken the sleepers by his words and his example; they were the chosen of the Lord and must prepare the way before him. Least among all men,

their humble little flock had been chosen by God from among his own people; in it Christians might find opportunity for the practice of brotherly love, and gain the kingdom of heaven.

None the less, Francis was not a visionary nor a rebel, and he fully understood the importance of the episcopal admonition. His relations with the clergy had, up to that time, been extremely simple. He professed and felt the greatest respect for all priests, who alone possessed the power of dispensing the divine sacraments, and above all the body of Jesus Christ. His respect for them was unqualified: the personal delinquencies, however great, of one priest or another did not affect him. It was held by the heretics of the time (and indeed the belief was widely spread, or, at any rate, there was a strong tendency in that direction, even outside their conventicles) that the moral unworthiness of the priest made him incapable of administering the sacraments, but Francis did not share it. He had absolute need of the priest. Divine inspiration had indeed instructed him how he should live and how he should preach to the people; but the remission of his sins, and, above all, Communion, the body of Jesus living and present in the Host, where could he obtain that except from a priest? He was not a priest, and did not intend to become one – his task was quite different; and priests alone, such was his Catholic faith, had sacramental powers. For these reasons his community and his way of life presupposed the Catholic clergy and complete harmony with them. Moreover, in addition to this sacramental need, he had a natural

filial respect for priests and bishops, and for his " lord the Pope." He had never thought to make his evangelical way of life, " which the Highest had revealed to him," an obligation to the priests, or even an example by which they should be judged. There was nothing of Pietro Valdo in him, or even of Arnold of Brescia.

Hitherto the clergy of Assisi (with whom alone he was in constant communication) had shown themselves neither hostile nor particularly favourable; they had let him alone, and that was enough for Francis. But now the head of the clergy began to reproduce, in however mild a form, the feelings of hostility and apprehension to which this strange community had given rise. Francis considered that they needed a formal safe-conduct from the ecclesiastical power; and he thought at once of the head of the Church. Rome was not far distant, and he knew the way well. But in order to get the Pope's sanction to live in accordance with the precepts of the Gospels, it would be necessary to put down in black and white the essential points in his way of life. Hitherto Francis had not felt the need of this, either for himself or for his companions, because the Spirit had spoken to him, and those who had joined him already knew what they must do; they had him as a leader, accepted without question, for the deep love and respect they bore him. But in the face of the outside world and in the presence of the hierarchy he must define and record his position.

It was thus that Francis came to draw up his rule, and since writing was not his strong point, he got one of his more learned companions to write it down for him, perhaps

Pietro Cattani. He defined and laid down as little as he could, though that little was the whole matter for him and his. He stated that the penitents of Assisi intended to profess the life of the Gospel of Jesus, in accordance with the three passages therefrom that God had placed before the eyes of Francis and his faithful Bernard in Santa Maria degli Angeli and in San Nicola: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give it to the poor"; "Ye shall take nothing for the journey"; "Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves." The prescribed habit was of the simplest and poorest kind: a tunic (patched as might be needed), a girdle, and drawers. No compulsory daily occupations were laid down, as for monks, because everyone was expected to work at the trade that he knew, provided that it was an honourable one, and if he had none, he was to go out and beg for alms. They were not to accept money either in payment for their labour or in charity. They were to possess no property, either as individuals, or as a community, not even the place in which they lived. There was no mention of monastic buildings or any other fixed abode; it was, in fact, assumed that they could live in various places and even in other people's houses, though in that case only to give their services. They were not to offer any resistance to anyone who might wish to take from them what they were using, or maltreat them, this also being in accordance with the words of the Sermon on the Mount. "Resist not the wicked man; . . . and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also

the other . . . give to every man that asketh of thee: and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." They were all to be Catholics and live in accordance with the Catholic faith and discipline; and they were to reverence the priests as the dispensers of the divine sacraments. Especial attention was to be paid to the reverence and obedience due to Pope Innocent and his successors.

Thus Francis drew up his Rule, in accordance with the words of the Gospels, short and simple, a rule of life and not a monastic organization: his sons would find nothing in it that they did not already know, believe, and practise. They all set out together for Rome to present themselves before the Pope. It was the spring of 1210. They told no one except Bishop Guido about their journey. Passing through Foligno, Spoleto, and Orte, the Poor Brothers of Assisi reached Rome, and, in accordance with one of their customs, they set out to find work, food, and lodging at a hospital, that of Sant' Antonio, almost opposite Santa Maria Maggiore. There was only the width of one street, the Via Merulana, between them and the papal palace of the Lateran.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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POPE AND PROPHET

INNOCENT III, WHOSE NAME IN THE WORLD HAD BEEN Lotario, of the family of the Counts of Segni, formerly Cardinal Deacon of the Church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, in the spring of 1210 was in the thirteenth year of his pontificate and nearly fifty years of age. Old age seemed very far away, and he could not know that he was never destined to reach it. He was in all the plenitude of his strength and his experience. Rather short in stature, like Brother Francis, his features were more regular and his face rather more refined: it was a fine, full, oval countenance, with two large, sparkling eyes under heavy, arched eyebrows – one of those faces that compel respect notwithstanding kindly demeanour and courteous address. His speech was eloquent, without pause or hesitation, and he was well served by a sonorous and melodious voice. He was an aristocrat in the fullest meaning of that word: aristocrat by birth and by temperament. He was a born ruler, with an iron will and an infinite sagacity, backed by a knowledge of jurisprudence that was something more than Roman. He had a more than ordinary knowledge of theology and ascetic philosophy and had compiled abstracts of the Bible and the Fathers; among others he had composed a short treatise on the "Worthlessness of the World and the Misery of Human Affairs," in which the ascetic horror of the world and of human life

reached its ultimate limits. But beyond all these scholastic exercises the Roman law and the canon law, and more especially the latter, had entered into the very bones of the one-time student of the Universities of Bologna and of Paris. He could always find appropriate authority and fluent arguments in support of any thesis. One of his favorite occupations was the study of difficult cases and the pronouncement of subtle, closely reasoned judgments.

Indeed, from all parts of the Christian world cases poured in to the Papal tribunal, which the Pope held in public three times weekly. At that time no one would have known or ventured to state precisely which cases should be referred to Rome and which should be tried on the spot. Just as Innocent himself said in his own forcible language, the church of Rome called upon the other churches to share in his solicitude for the Christian world, provided her supremacy was maintained; it was her duty to sit in judgment from the moment she had assumed the functions of Him "whose eyes look upon righteousness." Pope Innocent believed and maintained that all power on earth, spiritual priesthood and temporal dominion, emanated from the Pope as Vicar of Christ; the latter being, in most cases, exercised through emperors and kings, but in obedience to the Pontiff. In his mind there was no contraction between the extreme asceticism of the "*De contemptu mundi*" and this omnipotent authority. He was well aware, and admitted, that the temporal was inferior to the spiritual power, and he exalted the contemplative far above the active life. But the latter still remained necessary, and

human wickedness made the use of force inevitable. The world, wrecked by sin and incapable of governing itself properly, had confided the task to the Vicar of Christ, who alone was in possession of the proper remedies against the evil. The supreme and universal power of the Roman Chuch was an obligation laid upon it by God. Thus asceticism and authority came together like the two halves of a well-closed door. It was the Pontiff's duty to watch over the entire Christian society, provide against every eventuality, respond to any appeal that might be made to him, and solve any difficulty placed before him. Pope Innocent was not merely a jurist, but also – though this hardly pertained to his high office – a politician and a diplomat, skilful in estimating forces, in conducting negotiations, adapting himself to circumstances, and taking advantage of opportunities. Sometimes a sigh of weariness escaped him; his innumerable occupations wore him out and he would sometimes complain of feeling almost dazed. At such moments he must have realized that the temporal was ousting the spiritual, and the ultimate end must have been in danger of being overwhelmed by infinite and arduous intricacies of his daily avocations. But such moments were brief: his imperious disposition soon resumed control. He always felt more at ease when arguing a case, pronouncing judgment, or giving orders. He did all this because he thought it his duty; but in him his duty went hand in hand with inclination.

In that spring of 1210, as Innocent walked up and down the corridors of the Lateran, dictating a letter,

pronouncing sentence, or launching a bull of excommunication, the panorama of the Christian world appeared before his eyes more vast and more confused than ever. At Rome, after the disturbances and civil war of 1204, all was going tolerably well. The turbulent populace, who in Arnold's time had dared to ask the Pope to live once more upon his tithes and the offerings of the faithful, had acquiesced in the full pontifical authority exercised, by mutual consent, through the chief senator of the Commune. The Pope had succeeded in establishing a principate for his brother Richard out of lands belonging to the Kingdom of Naples, the bestowal of which was later to be confirmed by Frederick; these, with certain estates from the Patrimony of Peter, made him a reliable and tolerably influential vassal of the Pope. (The imperial marriage with the daughter of Philip of Swabia, who could have brought as her dowry the imperial claims to Tuscany, the Duchy of Spoleto, and the March of Ancona, had come to nothing owing to Philip's death; but the Pontiff had found ample compensation in the succession of his candidate, Otto, to the imperial throne.) Other relations of Innocent governed various parts of the Patrimony, among them Ninfa, which had not then been submerged under the poisonous vegetation of the marshes. They were useful *points d'appui* in the pontifical State.

Innocent's task in all this was a little like that of the shepherd in Manzoni who had to get back a stray sheep into the fold; when he had got one of them (it was another kind of animal in Manzoni) back on to the right way, he found another had already escaped. At that moment the inhabi-

tants of Narni were giving trouble: they were conducting their affairs without regard to the rights of the Holy See, they were occupying and oppressing other towns in the neighbourhood, they were taxing the clergy and giving refuge to heretics. They had been under excommunication and interdict for two years, but they still resisted obstinately. Innocent was reduced to proclaiming an economic boycott against them and ordering the clergy to leave the town; and if that was not enough, their bishopric would be taken from them. But only a few months before, he had had to threaten the Orvietans with an excommunication and interdict, because, under the very eyes of the Pope, who was staying at Viterbo, they had sacked Acquapendente without first laying their grievances before the papal tribunal. The Tuscan and Lombard communes were troublesome as usual: they were fighting among themselves without paying any serious heed to the pacific intervention of the Pope and his legates, and they were laying greedy and sacrilegious hands on the property of the Church and on ecclesiastical liberties. From year to year these struggles grew more protracted and broke out again more persistently. Those Lombards were too prosperous; in their prosperity wickedness flourished. If God had judged their cause, he must have destroyed Lombardy like Sodom and Gomorrah. Heretics swarmed openly in their cities, and were not concealed; they were sometimes treated on an equality with Catholics, and the communes granted them lands for their conventicles. There followed a succession of excommunications and interdicts.

There was another country, bordering on Lombardy

(indeed, its proximity must have carried the epidemic of error), in which heresy had assumed a tragic gravity. After long and ineffective negotiations for peace the crusade against the Albigensians had been launched at the end of the previous year. The plains of Provence, already bursting into flower, were strewn with heaps of ruins and dead bodies; and in the rich and splendid cities the smoke of pyres went up to heaven. Innocent was not always in agreement with the uncontrolled zeal of his legates. He tried to win over and protect the Count of Toulouse and the magnificent city from which he took his name, and had received him in Rome a few months before. But the Cistercian abbot Arnold Amalric and Count Simon de Montfort proceeded as seemed good to them.

Wherever he turned his gaze, Innocent III saw difficulties and disputes; and, by dabbling in pitch, to use a phrase of which he was fond, his hands at last were soiled. In France the scandalous and mysterious affair of the divorce between Philip Augustus and Queen Ingeborg was still pending. Philip Augustus had a very firm hold over his kingdom, including the clergy; and Innocent knew very well that France, besides being very dear to his heart, was the most important Catholic power. In England the question of the Archbishop of Canterbury's stipend had brought about a direct and open quarrel with King John; when the country was placed under an interdict, John had replied by persecuting the English Church, and was thereupon excommunicated. In Spain, Castile was making ready for war against the Moors; but the King of León was their secret ally. In

Portugal the Bishop of Oporto was at war with King Sancho, and, after several months' siege of the episcopal palace, had to fly to Rome almost destitute. The Latin Empire of Constantinople had been a brief consolation for the failure of the crusade: the Greek clergy remained for the most part refractory, and Innocent himself was obliged to protect them against the excessive proselytizing of the Latins; the barons and the Emperor did not respect the rights of the Church any better than their colleagues of the West; and the patriarch Morosini thought more of Venice than of Rome.

All these were matters of grave anxiety even for a born ruler. But more serious than all, in that spring of 1210, was the attitude of the new Emperor Otto, at that moment encamped in Lombardy. He had been Innocent's favourite: his agreement with Philip of Swabia had been merely a matter of sudden necessity, and, in spite of his brother's abortive royal marriage, in spite of his indignation at the crime of Otto of Wittelsbach, Innocent could not but see the judgment of God in Philip's unforeseen and violent death at the age of little more than thirty. While Philip was still alive, Otto proclaimed himself king by favour of the Pope, and had made the most extensive promises. On the eve of his coronation he had seemed reticent and reluctant, but the Pope had not ventured to turn back. When he had received the crown, he assumed authority over the Patrimony of St. Peter, the Duchy of Spoleto, and the March of Ancona, and made ready to invade the Kingdom of Naples. Philip Augustus had prophesied truly when he wrote to

Innocent that he would repent of the favour he had shown to the Guelph. And Innocent already began to think, with secret apprehension, whether it might not be necessary to have recourse to the last of the serpent brood of Swabia, to that Frederick who was already displaying far from encouraging dispositions.

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The Poor Brother of Assisi had nothing to say regarding the disputes with the cities of the Patrimony and the Lombard communes. The Kings of France and Italy were for him unknown potentates. The Emperor Otto had passed near by, only a few yards from Rivotorto and the Porziuncola, in sumptuous procession towards Rome, for the coronation. But Francis had not troubled to go and see him and had told his companions not to do so either. He had sent one of them alone to warn Otto, as the imperial cortège was passing through, of the brevity and vanity of earthly greatness. Francis, who was little of a respecter of persons, succeeded in gaining admission to the Lateran, and at length in obtaining audience with the Pope, who happened to be walking in one of the courts of the palace: but when the Pope saw this unknown peasant appear suddenly in his presence, he dismissed him in somewhat vigorous language. Francis understood that some intermediary was necessary, and he bethought him of his bishop, who had also come to Rome at that time – no doubt Innocent had caused him to be summoned to consult him on the political conditions of the Duchy and the city, which seemed again disposed to

declare for the party of the Emperor, while Perugia had renewed her agreements with the Pope. Bishop Guido promised Francis he would help him, and perhaps was the means of introducing him to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, Bishop of Sabina, doubly distinguished for his noble family and his position in the Sacred College. He concerned himself little with the business of the papal court, because he preferred religious meditation and a life of retirement – he was still a Benedictine monk of San Paolo and he was in fact still called Giovanni di San Paolo – but for that very reason he could the more easily sympathize with Francis. He did, in fact, give him a warm welcome, and was much impressed with his views. But the apostolic life seemed to him, as to Bishop Guido (and with more insight into the reasons, viewing matters, as he did, from the centre of the Roman Church), strange, and difficult, and full of dangers. If Francis and his companions had said farewell to the world and wished to lead the religious life, why did they not enter one of the existing religious orders? It was just such men as these who would reform and invigorate monasticism and the religious life. If they preferred to live alone, then they could retire to some hermitage, as so many had done before them and were still doing today. In one way or another their life would become orderly and regulated. But for them to go about, in the world and yet outside of it, possessing nothing, but forced to appeal to everyone for the means of subsistence, was quite irregular, and likely to lead to difficulties, indiscipline, and scandal.

Francis could find no objection to the arguments of the

venerable Cardinal, which were the fruits of wisdom and experience, except one: that the kind of life which he and his companions had adopted was not the life of the monastery or the hermitage, but the actual life of the Gospels; and that it was to that life that the voice of God had called them, and to no other. He said this submissively, and with his usual humility towards the clergy and dignitaries of the Church; but his submissive voice hardly concealed an unassailable determination. It may have occurred to the pious Cardinal to point out to Francis that he was deceiving himself in attributing his vocation to God; but he did not go so far. No doubt he, too, felt that Jesus was speaking through Francis, and human prudence is silent before the voice of God.

So he spoke about the matter in the curia to the Pope. The difficulties seemed even greater to the head of the hierarchy. But Innocent was a man of powerful intellect, and his heart was not hard. He continually sought, in accordance with what he believed to be his duty, the aggrandizement and power of the Church; but he knew that its ultimate and inspiring force was spiritual. And the Spirit did not dwell only among the powerful; it must be looked for and cultivated among the multitudes of humble people. One of his maxims was that " nothing must be done to disturb the religion of simple folk." For this reason he had on one occasion warned the Bishop of Metz to proceed cautiously in his measures against those members of his diocese who gathered together to read the Gospel in their own tongue: he had removed the ban on the Umiliati, favoured

the Poor Catholics, and tried sending preachers in the manner of the early Apostles as a measure of pacification in heretical Languedoc. He received Francis kindly, partly to make up for his previous welcome, made him explain his intentions, and said he would take time for reflection, recommending Francis in the mean while to pray God to give him light. He naturally took the advice of his cardinals, and among them the Cardinal of Sabina put forward a decisive argument. What was it these penitents claimed to do? To live in accordance with the Gospel. The Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, could not declare that to live in accordance with the Gospel was unlawful or impossible.

If Brother Francis had, like Arnold and the Waldensians, preached that the clergy must all of them give up the wealth that they possessed; if he had affirmed the incompatibility of the Christian Church and the institution of property, that would have been another matter. It would then have been no longer a question of withholding approval of his way of life; he would have had to be excommunicated and imprisoned as a heretic. But Francis did not think of preaching anything of this kind. It was not his intention to impose apostolic poverty either on the clergy or on anyone else as a duty: he claimed it for himself and his companions as a gift from on high. He displayed the greatest reverence for the clergy, the Roman Church, and the Pope, a simple and candid reverence, and consequently all the more sincere. It might be objected that his way of life provoked an inevitable comparison with the wealth of the clergy, the

pomp of the papal court, and even the manner of life of the various monastic institutions; it might be feared that in their striving after the " apostolic life," in their affirmation that this form of life was identical with that of Christ and His Apostles, there might appear an implied criticism, or at least a depreciation, of clerical life in general. But the distinction between " precepts " and " counsels " had been known to the Church for a thousand years; the admission of various grades of perfection was an integral part of Catholic doctrine. In its time, too, primitive monasticism had contained the germs of these criticisms and alterations of values, and so had every successive monastic reform and every experiment of canonical life for the clergy. Norbert, the founder of the Premonstratensians, had, in fact, eighty years before, called upon his clergy to adopt absolute poverty and had wished – exactly like Francis and in obedience to the same passage in the Gospel – to go preaching through the world, barefooted and destitute. This vagrant preaching was the most dangerous part of the life of poverty, because it brought the religious enthusiast and the populace into immediate contact, with consequent peril to sane doctrine and the authority of the hierarchy. The dispute with Waldus had mainly arisen as a result of preaching of this kind. On the other hand, with Norbert there had been no disputes at all. There had been a few difficulties at the beginning on the part of the local clergy, who were jealous of their authority, but Rome was not so ill-advised as to lend any support to this feeling, which soon died away.

Norbert finally gave up his career as a wandering preacher, and had even become a bishop, a role which he carried out to perfection. There were also at that time the Poor Catholics of Durando and Bernardo, who had, moreover, received a warm welcome. It was quite possible that Francis' enterprise might be destined to meet with an even greater success. In that case the Roman Church would enjoy the immense prestige of having within the fold, completely obedient to authority, one who professed complete poverty and the apostolic life. It would be the finest possible answer to the heretics and all the enemies of the ownership of property by the clergy and of ecclesiastical liberty.

So, in those spring days of 1210, within the walls of the Lateran, Innocent III and his advisers discussed the matter with the gravity and calm traditional in the Roman curia. They restrained the impulses of faith by the necessary considerations of human prudence; but these somewhat cautious and cold calculations were enlivened, and indeed overcome, by the reflection that it would be a notable achievement, and also very advantageous, if apostolic poverty could at last find a home within the Roman Church, to its greater safety and glory, after the first unsuccessful attempts. And the conclusion was, for Francis and his community, an attitude of benevolent expectation. Francis was readmitted to the presence of the Pontiff, of whom he asked permission to relate a parable, the parable of Lady Poverty:

" There lived in a desert a poor and lovely damsel: a king saw her, and loved her, and made her his own, and

begot sons upon her that were no less beautiful than their mother; and they grew up with her in solitude and poverty. When they were grown, their mother said to them: 'My dear ones, you must not be ashamed of your poverty, because you are the sons of a king; go to court and ask him for whatever you need.' So they went boldly thither and were not afraid before his face, whose likeness they bore upon their own. The King recognized himself in them and asked who their mother might be; they reminded him of the beautiful damsel in the desert, and the King straightway embraced them, saying: 'You are my sons and my heirs, be not afraid.'"

The damsel was Poverty, queen of the apostolic virtues, in solitude and neglect, her sons were Francis and his companions; the King was Jesus Christ, or the Pope, His Vicar, who had been moved to recognize the Poor Brothers of Assisi as the most legitimate sons of Jesus. The parable was a bold one, but the Pope listened to it with indulgence. Then he gave his blessing to Francis and his companions and authorized them to persevere in the kind of life they had chosen and to preach repentance to the people. If their community, by God's grace, survived and prospered, let them come back to him and he would show them further favours and lay upon them even greater tasks. With his practical good sense Innocent had realized that Francis' community was not, in the strict sense of the word, a religious community, and that the directions he had drawn up, by putting together a number of passages in the Gospel,

did not constitute a Rule. But for the time being there was no objection to this. If the family of Francis increased, he had made up his mind that he, Innocent, or his successors, would impose upon it the regularity of monastic life. He confined himself to making the penitents assume the tonsure, and directed that Francis only should receive the major order of the diaconate.

Francis, having humbly thanked and made obeisance to the Pontiff, went out of the Lateran well content. He was not so simple-minded as not to understand that Innocent's attitude was not one of absolute and definite approval. But it was enough that he had been authorized to pursue the apostolic life, and to be able to make use of this authorization in the face of lay or ecclesiastical opposition. Bishop Guido, with whom he was on very friendly terms, thought the papal approval a sufficient reply to the hostility of the Assisans. Full of joy, Francis and his companions, before they left the holy city, were then able to satisfy their devotion by a visit to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. Immediately in front of them, as they left the Lateran, was the long road leading to the other central point of the city, St. Peter's, the road trodden by the sumptuous papal processions, winding through the most famous monuments of imperial and Christian Rome. On that day the Papal Way (as it was called) witnessed a very humble procession of Christians: twelve barefooted peasants. Francis was then returning to the place where, five years before, he had in jest made his first experiment of poverty and of asking

for alms. Now he was poor in very truth, for and in God; and thus was he truly rich and truly blessed.

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HAVING made their devotions, the Poor Brothers of Assisi set out, along the Salarian Way, on their journey to the valley of Spoleto. They talked eagerly of the difficulties they had overcome and of the papal approval, of the apostolic rule that they must now observe more carefully than ever, and of God's goodness towards them. They had gone some distance in this way, without much noticing the road, right into the Roman Campagna, deserted then as it is today, and upon which the full heat of the sun beat down, for it was already summer. Overtaken by weariness, and beginning to feel hungry, they looked round them; and the sterile, bare grandeur of the Campagna, stretching monotonously into the distance as far as the eye could reach, seemed to those Umbrian hearts, accustomed to green plains, gentle hills, and the fresh murmur of running water, like some frightful desert. They were afraid they might die of hunger and thirst; and when they fell in with a peasant who charitably bestowed bread upon them, they thought it a miracle and took him for an angel from heaven.

After a few stages they emerged from the Roman desert, and at Orte the familiar landscapes of their own land began to appear. The place is truly beautiful: the city, with its dark Etruscan walls, climbing up the side of a rocky eminence that has all the appearance of some citadel

of the Roman Campagna, looks out over a wide, picturesque valley, shut in upon the horizon by a chain of azure heights. The excitements of Rome and the papal court, the fatigue of their long journey over the deserted Campagna, burnt and arid, seemed to call for some considerable rest; and the charm of the place induced them to prolong it. They stopped outside the city, in a solitary place, where an abandoned sepulchre provided them with shelter. They took it in turn to go into the city and get provisions, begging from door to door, while the others stayed behind to rest and talk and pray. Never before had they felt so deeply the joy of their poverty, which freed them from every bond and every anxiety and carried them back to the spontaneity of natural life, in immediate communion with nature and with God. They liked the place so much that they felt tempted to stay there, but thought there was danger in the temptation: they feared a Capuan leisure, though the classical allusion was unknown to them. Moreover, if they stayed too long in one place, they might give the impression of making it their own property, in contravention of their ideal of apostolic poverty. Furthermore, they were in doubt as to whether they should not devote themselves to a life of solitude instead of returning to their fellows; so they made a trial of such a life, agreeably enough, in that ancient cave in the green valley of Orte. Thus it looked as though the Cardinal of San Paolo, who had been worsted at Rome, would find his revenge soon after, on the way to Assisi. But Francis brought them back to themselves. It was God's will that they should devote themselves to the salvation of their

fellow men and preach repentance and peace to their brothers: this was the apostolic life revealed to them by God and approved by their lord the Pope. They all agreed, and after a week or two made an end of their little holiday and took the road to Assisi once more.

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THE PEOPLE'S SAINT

THE RETURN OF FRANCIS TO HIS OWN COUNTRY WAS A triumph, his first undisputed triumph. He had already attracted attention, kindly or hostile, sceptical or enthusiastic, and the journey to Rome, which had soon become known, had made the general interest in him still more keen. He was now coming back with the aureole of papal approval, and bestowed by such a Pope as Innocent III. Not even the clergy could raise any further objections from the moment that Francis had been expressly authorized by the Pope, not only to practise apostolic poverty, but to preach. The people were no longer willing to listen to him in the city square or in the Church of San Giorgio; they wanted to hear him in the Cathedral of San Rufino itself, which was not then completely finished, but was already the most important manifestation of the new life of Assisi: a work of faith, but also of economic prosperity and artistic vigour, an embodiment of the harmonious, vigorous unity of the Italian life of that time. The people, whose will had brought it into being, had watched it rise as a parent might watch the growth of his own son, and loved it as their most precious possession.

In the people's church Francis preached to the people and for the people. They felt more than ever that the new preacher was truly theirs. With him and his companions

was born again that community of spirit between the religious world and the lay world which a century before had almost been a matter of course, but had since then steadily diminished. From what the people found in the clergy of the time and would have preferred not to find, the Poor Brother of Assisi was immune; and what they sought without finding, that the Saint of Assisi gave them. In the face of Francis and his companions any comments on the worldly life of the religious was out of place; any indignation, real or feigned, at the wealth and pride of the ecclesiastics found no support. There was no longer any distinction between collective and individual property. The Poor Brothers of Assisi (to whom Francis had already given the name "Minor") had nothing of their own, either personally or in common. This time no one could find anything to cavil at: it was true apostolic poverty, complete and rigorous reproduction of the life of Christ. If there was an opening for any criticism, it was that the reproduction was too rigorous and too literal. Nor could it be said that the Poor Brothers of Assisi had exchanged one worldly possession for another and by renouncing wealth and property of any kind had in exchange acquired power, office, and political influence; nor need the peasants fear that the Brothers would lend themselves to the deception practised by their masters, of using religious authority to their own advantage.

With politics, either ecclesiastical or secular, Brother Francis concerned himself not at all. The communal authorities, who were working hard to subject clerical property to

taxation and to summon the clergy before the secular tribunals, received no support from his teaching; but neither did "ecclesiastical liberty" find in him a defender. All these matters belonged to that sphere of external authority which was alien to one who recognized only apostolic liberty and renunciation. Nor did he ever allow himself to be entangled in the internal controversies of the communes. If he had called his companions "Minors," the same name as that of the popular Assisan party, he had interpreted the name in his own way and explained his meaning to whoever wished to understand it. They were not called *Minori* because they wanted to turn out the *Maggiori* and themselves become *Maggiori*, the others in their turn becoming *Minori;* they called themselves so from choice, for they served all men and were served by none. They were the "least of the Little Brothers" in whom Christ would recognize himself on the Day of Judgment; and they soon began to call themselves the "Lesser Brothers" or "Friars Minor," abandoning their previous title of "Poor Brothers," which they fully deserved, but which they feared might give birth to vain ostentation.

Nevertheless the temptation to try to bring about peace drew Francis into politics. Peace indeed he preached every day of his life, but he enjoined it on individual consciences as a law of God, not as between warring political parties, by means of agreements founded on precarious and superficial reconciliations, and on purely mechanical and provisional distributions of honours and burdens. Many ecclesiastics, from cardinal legates and the Pope down to ordinary

priests, had worked to bring about such reconciliations, and the mendicant orders, and among them the sons of St. Francis, were soon to work for the same purpose. Such pacifications were ephemeral because they arose from a momentary triumph or weakness, or merely from the calculations of political opportunism; and the peacemakers, in deciding the controversies entrusted to their arbitration, found it hard to conduct themselves without a certain partiality, or without serving some personal end, or at least without being suspected of doing so. It was the old saying of Innocent III that he who touched pitch ended by soiling his hands. Francis' activity remained purely religious and individual: individual even when he spoke to the multitude, because he appealed to every man's inner conscience and not to hierarchies and social institutions. Francis contented himself with preaching spiritual peace, the pacific attitude of mind: he did not concern himself to lay down conditions for the readmission of the banished party and the distribution of offices of State. The extraordinary adventure of the Dominican Giovanni di Vicenza (a few years subsequent to his death), the great peacemaker of the Marches of Treviso, before whom (so it was related) four hundred thousand persons gathered together at Paquara on the Adige, did not, and could not, happen to Francis. Never, exclaims a chronicler, since the times of Jesus Christ had so great a crowd assembled to hear a preacher. The new Messiah, in order to further his pacific purposes, got himself made *podestà* and Dictator of Vicenza and Verona. After a few months he found himself in prison; and on be-

ing released he was compelled to depart from that country, which desired no more to do with him.

Accordingly, the name of Francis is not specifically mentioned in the articles of peace concluded in Assisi between the *Maggiori* and the *Minori* on November 9, 1210. By this instrument each side undertook to refrain from making political alliances for its own advantage by entering into relations with other communities and forming parties within the State, and promised to return once more to its allegiance to the Commune, one and indivisible. Moreover, the liquidation of the feudal burdens was finally settled, in accordance with certain definite principles, in favour of all the citizens of Assisi. The agreement marked the end of the disputes that had begun at the end of the preceding century and was a success for the *Minori*, although both sides submitted to the same conditions. Even if Francis took no part in it, yet his preaching and the very prestige that he himself and his band of followers conferred on the name "Minor" could not have been without influence on the attitudes of mind that gave birth to the agreement. This success of the popular party meant liberty and equality, or at least more liberty and more equality than before; and the moral roots of these political principles were certainly nearer to the Franciscan spirit than those of the opposing side.

Assisi seemed to have remained in a state of internal tranquillity until about the time of the Saint's death, and the prestige of the man of God, who was outside and above politics, continued very high in the estimation of the

populace. When the restoration of the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore (or, as it is commonly called today in Assisi, the " Vescovado," because the bishop's palace stands beside it) had been completed, an inscription was put up recording the work, " in the time of Bishop Guido and Brother Francis." Together with the Bishop, the Little Brother appeared as the spiritual head of the city. His work had begun with the restoration of churches: and in the restoration of a church his name found its first official consecration.

In this way there grew up between the life of Francis, so remote from politics, and the life of the city certain ideal relations and contacts on a higher plane. He could have, indeed, no part or lot in what seemed the most important question of the time: the award of the imperial crown, and the dispute between the Papacy and the Empire. The struggle between Innocent III and Otto began openly shortly before this time and lasted for several years, and Frederick of Swabia gathered the fruit of it. The quarrel had not been brought to an end at the death of Innocent in 1216; but Otto's fortunes had already fallen. The rapid decline and the untimely end of the Guelph ruler lent the savour of miraculous prophecy to the warning which Francis had given him when on his triumphal progress towards Rome. Francis, indeed, had no idea of imitating the example of his own city, which professed fidelity to Otto even after the rupture with the Pope (the treaty of peace of November, 1210, is headed by the names of the Emperor and of Diopoldo, Duke of Spoleto, while there is no mention of the Pope). But neither did he take any cognizance of the

other side, or, indeed, of the quarrel at all. His calm indifference over Emperor and Empire and their disputes with the Roman curia, contained, without his knowing it, a profound political truth: the ephemeral character of the imperial power, and the artificiality of the importance which everyone in Italy still attached to the struggles between the Papacy and the Empire, though they had already ceased to direct the true course of history.

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Francis renounced money, accounting it as no better than dust and filth, and, as it were, placed it under a ban. He kept himself entirely outside public life: he took no part in the municipal struggles, not even as peacemaker; he cared nothing for the Empire, and in his devotion to the Pope he looked on him solely as the head of religion. His asceticism seemed more rigorous than all that had gone before, a more complete renunciation of life, joy, and activity. And yet it was not so: it was conquest, not renunciation; expansion, not constraint. For him poverty was not a sacrifice, the renunciation of a good thing, though in exchange for a better one; it contained no element of penitence or expiation. Though there was not wanting the traditional ascetic significance of an avoidance of occasions for sin, an obstacle removed from the way of salvation, this was not his original feeling nor his main intention. Francis had not abandoned his possessions, nor welcomed those who came to follow his example, from a haunting fear of hell but from a fervent love of God and his fellow men.

He had not brought himself to live by humble labour, and on charity begged from door to door, in expiation of his sins, but to unburden his life, and because of the joy that was within him. Wealth and property were for him a load and an encumbrance from which he had rid himself in order to walk on his way free and unhampered. Spiritual liberty is also physical. Having no property to look after, no baggage to carry with him, no servants to attend him; always sure of finding what was needful wherever he went, because he was ready to reduce his wants to a minimum; satisfied with the earth to lie upon, by the light of the stars, a little fruit or herbs of the field for his food, and clear water from the streams to quench his thirst, Francis had the whole world at his disposal and moved about it like a king. He did not wander about from caprice or for amusement: he obeyed the command of the Spirit. But this obedience was freedom and joy: to ramble over the beautiful countryside, the smiling hills, the cold, calm mountains, was pure delight to him. When he had no companions, the flowers of the fields and the birds of the woods kept him company and spoke to him of God better than they. Nature, which the heretical sects laid under a more severe condemnation than orthodox asceticism, was for him divine joy and activity.

For the common people, who feel and understand without reasoning, the life of Francis had two meanings. It proclaimed that property was not the sole good, nor, indeed, one of the most important; that he who had it was not necessarily happy, and that he who had it not was not neces-

sarily unhappy. There are good things that cannot be appropriated, that can be distributed without risk of using them up, more precious than gold and more valuable than any property: air, sun, green fields, love of one's fellows, and faith in God. All this had been said and written for a long time and by many people: now it was being put into practice and could be seen by everybody. And the life of Francis also proclaimed that God did not exist only in churches and convents. He was to be found among men who loved each other as brothers, in the smile of nature around them, in every pure heart and untroubled mind.

Looked at from a distance and in accordance with conventional ideas and the exact distinctions which the modern mind is apt to make, the life and words of Brother Francis seem in glaring contradiction with the entire civilization of his age. A capitalistic civilization concerned above all with the production and acquisition of wealth; a "realistic" civilization, absorbed in activity and conquest in every field: a civilization of hard and definite worldly interests, not of religious impulses and sentimental idealisms. But in Italy of those days (perhaps because she was vigorous and great) there were forces and aspirations that do not appear to the cold eye of the realistic historian. The Italian of that day was devoted to the real, but kept his eyes on the ideal; he fought, and yet thirsted for peace; he grew rich, yet with his riches he longed for virtue and beauty; he engaged in business, and he worshipped God; he worked, and he dreamed. In this capitalistic, realistic, and worldly society Francis represented the reverse

of the medal, the ideal that all longed for and the fulfilment of what was wanting. He did not impose on everyone his own poverty and his own way of life; rather, by his example, he reduced to their just value the aims that men pursue. He opened men's lungs, as it were, and gave them wings for higher flights. His life and words did not condemn work, which was the source of this new wealth and gayer life, but they laid down as an ideal that all should work, and be content to live by their own labour, without accumulating personal wealth by robbing others of the necessaries of life. He said, and he practised the doctrine himself, that alms were Christ's legacy to those who had nothing, but that a man should not take them unless he were truly in need, and must be ready to relinquish them to one who might be in even greater necessity; otherwise it would be robbery. To everyone, in short, in accordance with his needs. These were not reasoned and coördinated ideas, they were impulses of feeling and flashes of genius, which did not go beyond the moral appeal and personal example. Here indeed was a danger – that this poverty, this abjuration of money, this life of renunciation, might become an end in itself, although a means to a higher and fuller life; the letter that subdueth, though the spirit giveth life. Francis, so far as he was concerned, overcame this danger also, by his religious and human sympathy.

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On their return from Rome, the Little Poor Brothers had again taken up their abode in the hut of Rivotorto. There

they were much cramped for space, so much so that it was agreed that their Father should assign the place which each brother was to occupy: otherwise, when they were all present, there was a risk of their being unable to get in. Francis and his companions were perfectly content: " It is a quicker journey to heaven," he would say, " from a hut than from a palace." They were chased out of the place by the boorish suspicions of a peasant, who did not know, or who despised, the character of Francis and his companions. He entered the hut one day, driving his donkey in front of him, and shouting " Go inside, we too might improve the place a little." Francis understood that the peasant wanted to taunt him and his companions with having set up as owners of the hut on the pretext of having restored it. That was exactly what Francis would not be or seem to be – a proprietor, safeguarding his rights and possessions. He quickly removed from the place, and decided to settle where their church already was, at the Porziuncola. The Brothers built themselves huts of branches and earth, beside the chapel in the surrounding wood.

With the intention of avoiding his experience at Rivotorto, Francis decided to put the position in order. The little church belonged, as has been said, to the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Subasio, which was reached by a steep ascent, up precipitous rocky beds of torrents now dry, from the road from Assisi to Spello, or from the " *Carceri,*" along a more level, but not less rocky road (both of them stopped some distance from the church). The monks were in friendly relations with the Commune, and indeed had

shortly before this time presented it with several houses in the Piazza Maggiore near the temple of Minerva, for the construction of the new communal palace. Their relations with Bishop Guido were not equally friendly; they had several long lawsuits with him, which were decided by the curia, under Honorius III, in their favour. During those years the Bishop also found himself at issue with the "*Crociferi*" of San Salvatore delle Pareti, who were the owners, at least in theory, of the hut at Rivotorto. It is curious to note how the Bishop of Assisi was in litigation with both the landlords of the first Franciscan community.

The Abbot of San Benedetto made no difficulty over assigning the little chapel, together with the small piece of ground adjoining it, to the use of Francis and his companions. He must already have known him and been kindly disposed towards him, since he had restored the chapel and brought it back into use for services. Francis of course would not accept any gift of property, but only a permission to use it. And in order to prove that the property still belonged to the Abbey he sent every year to the Abbot a jar of those small fish that are called locally "*lasche*," caught in the river Tescio.

In this way the whole life of the Friars Minor concentrated round Santa Maria degli Angeli; and the place became very dear to Francis and all his more devoted companions. It was there that he had received the revelation from God of the kind of life he was to lead, and it had been the place of his own spiritual birth. There too he had gathered together his first recruits, even if their material habi-

tation had been at first some distance off. It was from there, as from a strategic point, that he and his companions had set forth upon their pilgrimages, and there they had returned to meet again. Even when the Order increased and multiplied, the Porziuncola remained for Francis the most important community, the mother of all the others; and he wanted it to be the mirror of them all. It was there that he assembled the best of his followers, there he took personal care to see that they maintained perfect discipline, in their work, in their prayers, and in their meditations: he forbade any unprofitable discourse and would have no stranger admitted. In the phrase of the first Franciscan historian, an angelic life was led at Santa Maria degli Angeli. For Francis, God's grace was everywhere to be found, but in especial abundance in that place. And for this reason he would urge his companions never to leave it. "If you are turned out of one part of it," he would say, "come back to another: this place is truly sanctified, and the habitation of God." And he reminded them with deep earnestness how in that place the All-Highest had shed His inspiration on the hearts of his poor brothers; how their numbers had increased; and how he had inflamed their enthusiasm with his own ardour. And he added: "He who prays here with devotion shall obtain what he asks for; he who shall offend God here shall be more heavily punished."

In this way the prestige of that place grew enormously, both in the Order and outside. A halo of sacred legend already hovered over it. It was said that the humble little

church on the margin of the wood, half ruined and abandoned before Francis had built his nest there, had been called after the angels, because the song of its celestial inhabitants could be heard there. It was related that the Saint himself had said that the place was frequented by angels; and these words could not fail to be interpreted as a confirmation of the belief. Francis had also revealed how the Blessed Virgin loved this church more than any other in the world that had been built in her honour. There was much talk of a vision seen there by one of the Brothers before he entered the Order: a great multitude of blind people were kneeling round the Porziuncola, stretching out their hands to God, beseeching him to show them mercy. And behold a great light came from heaven and unsealed their eyes, which had till then been closed.

Thus, in the pious faith of Francis' devoted followers within and without the Order, and more especially among the followers of the strict Franciscan observance, the Porziuncola seemed a sacred place, one of the sanctuaries of the earth: a place rich in blessings, not only for the Order, but for all believers, for humanity itself. The light of the vision that had shone upon the blind multitudes round Santa Maria was made manifest and concrete in the plenary indulgence allowed by the Church to as many of the faithful as on a certain day in the year (August 1) should have prayed and received the sacraments in that centre of the Franciscan Galilee. It was the most important bestowal that the Church had made until then out of the treasure of the merits of Christ and the saints entrusted to her keeping: it was the same as was granted to the pilgrims to the Holy

Land and the crusaders. It is true that the definition of a crusade had suddenly been extended, and certain mitigations had been allowed: under Innocent III it was enough to fight the Albigensians in Provence rather than the Mohammedans in Palestine; and later, under Gregory IX, everyone who took up arms against the excommunicate Frederick II was a crusader. It always involved, however, leaving one's country and one's occupations, taking up arms (or the pilgrim's staff), and facing frightful hardships and mortal perils. But the Franciscan halo that encircled the Porziuncola made a visit to the little Umbrian chapel suffice to obtain that supreme prize so longed for by all the faithful. So great a benefaction, which we find established, after discussion and opposition, in the second half of the century, could be ascribed only to the Saint in person; and it is related that he obtained it orally from Honorius, without any written authorization. Even today pious crowds make the wearisome pilgrimage, under the burning heat of July, from the Abruzzi and Ciociaria, and on the first of August fill, with their characteristic tumult, the basilica that has grown up round the little chapel, and the square outside it. The tumult reaches its height at the moment of the "*rotta*," when, that is to say, upon the first stroke of the hour that marks the beginning of the great day, the faithful struggle to be first to enter and leave the church, in accordance with the rite laid down for the indulgence.

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DURING the first period of their sojourn at the Porziuncola the life of the Franciscan Brothers was no different from

that which they had led at Rivotorto. The increase of the community was not yet so great as to necessitate organizations and subdivisions. Their only spiritual bond was their obedience to Francis, spontaneous and cheerful, born of absolute faith and filial love. It was hardly necessary for Francis to speak, for his wishes to be fulfilled; he was perfectly conscious of his unique authority, and in his gentle words could be detected the confident tone of one inspired; for his community, after God came Francis. "I command you," he would say, "by your obedience to God and to me"; or again: "Do this for the love of God and of me."

He was a searcher of hearts; he could guess exactly what was going on in the hearts of his followers, and could tell, in certain circumstances, what they were doing when far away out of his sight. On one occasion a certain pious and humble Brother had persuaded himself, in that scrupulous anxiety by which good men are often so sorely tried, that St. Francis disliked him. In his utterly ingenuous veneration for the Father he took this for a sure sign of God's wrath and was continually tormented by the idea. One day Francis called him and said: "My son, you must not give way to temptation; banish the idea that has become fixed in your head. You are very dear to me, and I look on you as one of those most worthy of my love. Come to me whenever you like and speak to me freely." And from that day the Brother was happy and at peace. Thus Francis knew how to dispel, by a few simple and penetrating words, the troubles of his Brethren, and continually spread around him a soothing and sanctifying influence.

The Brothers' obedience to, and veneration for, Francis, who for them came first after God and was the pathway between them and the divine, was of course combined with love for each other; love as among the children of a common father, a community of thoughts and works and feelings. Each of them found his greatest joy in the company of his fellows; and there was much simple and touching discourse, intermingled here and there with cheerful laughter. If one of them appeared sad, the others would immediately notice it and ask him what was the matter; nor could they be at peace until they had consoled him. When, on their missionary pilgrimages, they had to part company, such separation made them cast down, although they took the greatest delight in their obedience and their preaching. If they committed any transgression, it was laid down by their Father that they should confess it to each other while waiting for the priestly absolution.

They still earned their livelihood by their labour, doing whatever they knew how and could find to do. They worked more especially as servants and labourers of all kinds, above all in leper hospitals, and indeed anywhere that they could without discredit to themselves. They often helped the peasants and others of the common people in their labours: they collected wood, brought in the vintage, and helped to crush the grapes in the vat, collected walnuts, of which they were given a share for themselves, sifted flour, drew water, and cleaned the house. One thing their Father had laid down quite definitely – that they must accept only inferior positions, in which they would obey and

not command. They still lived with extreme simplicity, more so, indeed, than they could have wished: sometimes they even wanted for bread and had to be content with turnips, begged here and there on the plain of Assisi, and the coarsest herbs. The one rough habit that each possessed wore out and fell into rags, but they did not therefore throw it away, for it was by no means always that they had another to put in its place; they repaired it with a bit of old sacking that was past use.

Work alternated with prayer. Unlike the religious orders, they did not sing offices; and they had no place in which they could recite them, being without convent buildings and a conventual church. The Chapel of Santa Maria was hardly big enough to hold them all: and besides, anyone else who wanted to come was allowed to do so. Even after the journey to Rome they did not form a real Order, and did not contemplate doing so. Francis had indeed bidden them pray at the canonical hours, matins, tierce, and so on, and the paternoster was their favourite prayer. He had also taught them a prayer of his own: "We worship Thee, O Christ, and we reverence all Thy churches that exist in the whole world; and we bless Thee, because Thou hast redeemed the world by Thy holy cross." The first disciples had all been laymen; when priests as well came to join their company, they naturally continued to recite their breviary. The first priest who followed Francis seems to have been one Silvestro, from whom the recently converted Francis had bought stones for the restoration of San Damiano and the Porziuncola, without leaving him very well

satisfied with the price paid. When Bernardo, having decided to follow Francis, was giving his property away to the poor, Silvestro the priest happened to be present, and said to Francis that with all that money he now had the means to pay him a little better. Francis, with a smile, had thrown him a handful of money without counting it, and Silvestro had quickly picked it up. But he then began to think the matter over; and he thought it over to such purpose that he, too, hastened to strip himself of everything, following in the footsteps of his customer.

With the arrival of Silvestro, and of the other priests that joined them, the community could begin to make better provision for its spiritual needs. By means of the Mass, Confession, and Communion, they would in the end have become identified with the secular clergy or a religious order. It was not the wish of Father Francis, either then or later, that his followers should receive Holy Orders, though he readily accepted any priests who might desire to join them. It would have been contrary to his principle of humility; moreover, he conceived his mission as distinct from that of the clergy, though it was ancillary to theirs. He looked to the clergy to administer the sacraments: it was for him and his followers to preach the kingdom of God and practise the apostolic life. St. Paul, too, had written: "God has not sent me to baptize, but to convert." Francis himself did not wish to go beyond the diaconate, which he had accepted out of obedience to Rome, when Pope Innocent wanted to regularize his position and that of his earlier followers, and to confer on them the dignity and protection of clerical

rank. Situations of the kind were not by any means rare in the Church of those days, in which it frequently happened that popes were elected before they had said Mass, as had been the case with Innocent III; for cardinal deacons were really deacons and not yet priests, even less bishops, in complete contrast to what we find today.

If Francis believed that he had a special mission from God, distinct from that of the clergy, he did not therefore regard himself as their superior. In his eyes the priests continued, as always, to enjoy the highest privilege, and one which could never be taken from them: they consecrated the body of God. Francis' faith in the mystery of the Eucharist was unalloyed and absolute. For him, those who did not see in the consecrated bread and wine the body and the blood of Christ were no better than the Jews, who, having had Jesus in their midst, knew only the Man and did not believe him to be in truth the Son of God. His faith was combined with reverent awe and infinite tenderness: "The whole world fears and trembles and Heaven rejoices when Christ the Son of God lives upon the altar, under the hand of the priest. Oh marvellous and astounding condescension, oh sublime humility, oh humble sublimity, that the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, should humble Himself to the point of hiding for our salvation under the semblance of a little bread! Look, my brothers, upon God's humility, and let your hearts be melted before Him. Humble yourselves likewise, that He may exalt you. You are to keep nothing for yourselves, because you are receiving within you Him who gave Himself wholly for you." Thus

in the Eucharist he found the two great gifts of his own soul: charity that comes from love, and poverty that comes from giving. Just as in His life on earth Christ had become poor and lived upon alms, so He continued to humble himself under the simple guise of the Eucharistic elements: and always from an infinite love of humanity. Love and poverty were combined in Christ, just as Francis wanted them to be combined in his own life and in the life of his followers.

He prostrated himself with unchanging devotion before the priest who administered the Eucharist. "God gave me" – so it is written in his Testament – "and still gives me, so great a faith in the priests who live according to the rule of the Holy Roman Church, by reason of their Orders (that is, their sacramental power), that I should still have recourse to them even if they persecuted me. And were I as wise as Solomon, and in the company of the humblest secular priests, I would not therefore preach in their parish against their will. And I would fear and love and honour them and all the rest, as my masters. And I will not heed anything they may do wrong, because I see in them the Son of God, and they are my masters. And this I do because in this world it has not been given to me to look upon the Son of God, the Highest, excepting only His holiest Body and Blood, which they receive, and alone administer to the rest."

From this passage from Francis' Testament (which, together with the "Hymn to Creation," is the most Franciscan of the Saint's writings) we can fully understand his

attitude to the clergy and the Roman Church. He believed blindly in her sacraments, and in them alone, and his soul needed them more than his body needed bread. The notion of a new lay priesthood was entirely foreign to his mind. For that reason he could not have become a Waldensian, or anticipated Protestantism. He reverenced the Roman Catholic priesthood as the sole possessor of the most divine treasure ever bestowed upon mankind. He could not think of disobeying it, or even of passing judgment on it. His preaching was all in the direction of submission and renunciation of himself. One thing alone might perhaps have made him hesitate (I would not go so far as to say fail) in his submission: a prohibition from preaching the "apostolic life," which he announced as having been revealed to him by God, and not by men, just as Saint Paul had claimed in the case of his own divine mission. But the prudence of the Holy See had spared him the ordeal.

CHAPTER NINE

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THE WAYFARER

THE PORZIUNCOLA WAS FOR FRANCIS A HOLY SPOT, A beloved sanctuary, the resting-place that his soul needed: it was not merely the seat of the "General of the Order." If anyone was directed thither to find and talk with him, the visitor would run a considerable risk of making his journey in vain. Francis was continually on the move; for such was his mission, his way of life, and his own inclination.

The places in Italy that he visited, according to the historical records, were many; and as these appear in casual references, they can be only a part of the total. If we were to include the popular legends, the number would be infinite. Terni, Perugia, Gubbio, Città di Castello, Cortona, Arezzo, Siena, Florence, Bologna, Ancona, Osimo, Ascoli: these are some of the places that he visited. It is at once observable that they are all in a definite and rather circumscribed district. The Saint's appearances in the more remote and diverse parts of the country, such as Rome, Florence, Bologna, and Alexandria, were, in proportion, few and far between; and one gets the impression (borne out by the definite or circumstantial evidence of the records) that these were but occasional visits. The other places, on the contrary, appear to represent his usual and appointed circuit. If you take a map of Italy and draw a

circle with Assisi as its centre, with a diameter of a little less than two hundred kilometres, you will include them all, from Borgo San Sepolcro to Ascoli Piceno, Rieti, and Toscanella, the extremest points being roughly equidistant from Assisi.

The world of Francis, the preacher wandering in the company of Lady Poverty, was the world of central Italy, and, even so, of one particular section of it: Umbria (including the Sabine country), the Marches, and southern Tuscany. The two latter districts are, in general characteristics, not unlike the first; and thus we may say with reasonable justice that this world of Francis was Umbria.

He was in no way afraid of long journeys; indeed, he rather liked them; and now that he had become famous, and found groups of disciples and admirers nearly everywhere, they involved no particular hardships. If, notwithstanding this, the range of his usual peregrinations remained, as it did, quite definitely limited, there could be only one reason for this. Francis felt at ease on Umbrian ground, and within Umbrian horizons. His spirit found in that earth and that air a secret and profound affinity; and his words awoke their clearest echoes among the Umbrian people. His Christian cheerfulness was in keeping with the austere serenity of the landscape, with its harmonious poise and symmetry. The somewhat monotonous grandeur of its outlines accorded with his continual contemplation of the divine, and their suavity appealed to his human sympathy. Of all this there was no lack, for his eyes were never sated; nor did it ever become wearisome or the impression too vivid, because

his mind was never troubled. Hills and mountains soared aloft to heaven: but not so abruptly or with such savage grandeur as to overwhelm mere human weakness. It was the country in which heaven and earth came nearest to each other, and heaven enfolded and imbued the earth with its own majestic calm. Thus, in the spirit of Francis, the human passed without stress into the divine.

The inhabitants were not unlike the country, allowing for the imperfect approximation of man to the handiwork of God. Umbria at that time, as indeed today, was sensibly behind northern Italy in the development of its culture. There were no great cities and powerful communes; the strongest, Perugia, was incomparably inferior to Florence and Milan. There were the usual external and internal wars; but they were in general less bitter and protracted, and also less frequent. The decade that came to an end in 1220 was a period of practically untroubled peace for the whole Duchy: it was only at the end of that time that the ancient quarrel between Narni and Terni degenerated into a brief but wide-spread warfare, brought to an end by the intervention of the curia, which reasserted the sovereign authority of the Holy See. In Umbria there was no Lodi, or Fiesole, or Tusculum to fall into fierce ruin; it was only at the extreme limit of the province, in Perugia, that Castiglione Chiugino displayed a certain unhealthy rivalry as against the more powerful and more warlike communes. They lived largely apart: the Empire, except for Duke Conrad, was far away, the Leopolds and Diopolds were little more than names, and the Emperor Otto had merely

passed through. The new conflict between the Pope and the Emperor did not arouse very profound echoes; and the power of the Church, even under the severe rule of Innocent, remained weak and remote, between each passage of arms. Gentleness has remained a characteristic of Umbrian manners throughout the centuries: murders and brawls are even today a rarity, and party strife has rather the semblance of a foreign importation. Gentleness and courtesy: until at least a few years ago the Umbrian peasant greeted, with friendly respect, every unknown traveller that he met. There were no great fortunes, no vast estates, little spirit of initiative or desire to accumulate wealth, no rigid delimitation of social classes, and a general diffusion of kindness: such were the characteristics of the people of Umbria, and so they have remained until today, scarcely different from what they were in the time of St. Francis.

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In this natural and human world that was so familiar and so near to his heart, Francis moved about on short but almost incessant journeys, especially in the earlier years. Then came the more remote expeditions, the superintendence of the various communities that began to increase and multiply at a distance, the negotiations and disputes over the final constitution of the Order, the detailed elaboration of the Rule, the illnesses and solitary retirements of the last years. The decade 1210–20, and more especially the first five years of it, was the classic period of Francis as a wandering preacher, the gay jester of God. He set out free

and unencumbered, because he carried nothing with him. He took one companion, and there was, no doubt, intense, though discreet, rivalry among the Brothers for this honour, which must have been greatly prized. And so they went forward together, talking, praying, singing, or in silence. They would rest and refresh themselves on the grass, beside a brook, with a little bread or a handful of fruit or dried vegetables, seasoned by their hunger and the joy in their hearts, and washed down by draughts of fresh running water; they rested all night in some peasant's cottage, or in a cave, or in a hospital for the poor and sick, more especially for lepers: thus charity and necessity went hand in hand. In whichever direction they went, from the plain of Santa Maria the road began to climb upwards, more gently at first, as long as it was a main highway, and then with a more abrupt ascent as they got on to the by-ways beloved of travellers. The horizon began to widen, the plain stretched away beneath them, wrapped in soft undulations of mist; the outline of the hills became more sharply marked; and the mountains stood out far away against the azure distance. They did not always fix their destination beforehand, and at cross-roads they allowed the inspiration of the moment, or some chance that they regarded as providential, to decide the way they should take.

When they reached a city or a town, their entrance was sometimes unobserved; but on other occasions the fame of Brother Francis had preceded him. The brusque greetings and contemptuous indifference were now but a recollection of the earliest journey, not unpleasant to recall in the hour

of success. Today the greeting was much more likely to be a popular triumph: something like the entrance of Jesus into Capernaum or Jerusalem. The bells were rung as upon a feast-day, men and women ran to meet him, children clapped their hands and sang, waving green branches. He was soon the centre of a jostling crowd, who wanted to see the Saint and touch his tunic, from which they looked for some definite favour, or hoped for some vague benefit, or wanted simply to satisfy their curiosity and devotion. Above all they came to hear him speak; and the Saint, unless he was merely passing through, had come for that very purpose. But he wanted first to regularize his position. He called upon the bishop or the priest of the parish, and greeting him, as was his wont, with " God give you peace," he asked leave to preach. The request was made with humility, but also with the certainty of one whose mandate comes from God; and if, as happened sometimes, the reply was in the negative, the Saint did not give in quite so easily. He went away, and then after a short time returned to ask permission once more; when a father (he would say) chases his son out of one door, he comes in by another. It was difficult to resist, especially because it was necessary to reckon with the people.

Thus Francis began to preach, in church, or in the market-place, which was more open and where one could breathe more freely (and clerical susceptibilities were less likely to be hurt). He had never, in either place, adopted the portentous manner of the professional preacher, with his pompous exordium, elaborate argument, and grandiose

or pathetic peroration. On the road he preferred to talk to his companion, pray to God, look at the trees and flowers and sky, listen to the song of the birds and try to rival them. He spoke from the inspiration of the moment. Sometimes his inspiration failed him; he was not disturbed at this; he would calmly confess that nothing had come into his mind that he could say to them, and would send the crowd away with his blessing. His popularity was such as to be equal even to this test. But this was, of course, a rare event; he generally spoke without embarrassment, confronting a great crowd as if he were talking to a single individual. He avoided long sermons, both from taste and from conviction. He was brief, as everyone is who has something to say.

In some of these popular assemblages miracles, the offspring of faith, were not absent. There were often poor creatures who were out of their minds, " possessed," whom the words of the Saint, the touch of his hands, brought back to tranquillity. But we are told of even more remarkable instances. At Gubbio a woman whose hands were withered recovered their normal use at the touch of the Saint; at Narni another woman's eyes, stricken with blindness, at the sign of the cross made by Francis saw the light once more. And yet such prodigies were not so frequent with him as with other saints; and, even in the eyes of the people, the preacher and apostle was of more importance than the worker of miracles.

In his sermons Francis spoke clearly and frankly, but with determination. He called such things as vices and

wrongdoing by their proper names. He remained completely aloof from political questions and internal and external disputes, on his travels as much as in Assisi; but he would freely admonish a government that seemed to him morally reprehensible. He was quite capable of speaking with severity at that time against the spirit of tyranny and the cruelty of wars of conquest, and, in the midst of civil discord, of proclaiming the just chastisement of God upon those who oppressed their own neighbours. The political and social reasons for these struggles were unknown to Francis; for him war and violence were essentially evil and sinful, and the more so when they occurred among those of the same country. And his special abhorrence of civil war, which he regarded as the worst of evils, did not arise from any civic sense or statesmanship, but was simply a religious and human feeling.

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Francis' popular success was accompanied by certain peculiar features that seem not a little odd to us today. Many were due to his passion for humility, and under a semblance of theatricality, which betrays Francis' artistic leanings, there lay a profound sincerity. He was loaded with praises, utterly beyond his deserts, in his opinion, and they sometimes became quite intolerable. His was truly Christian humility, combined with natural good sense; but there was a little perverse pleasure in insults and maltreatment. Thus, he would sometimes summon a Brother to him and, in virtue of his obedience, order him to call him a

scoundrel, a rogue, and a good-for-nothing. The poor Brother might have observed that Francis was making rather a strange use of religious obedience. But none the less he did not dare to think so, and he faithfully obeyed the order. Francis would then express his pleasure and approval: "Well said; may God bless you; it is right that Pietro Bernardoni's son should hear such things." When, for reasons of health, he had to interrupt his regime of frugality and abstinence, he felt it necessary to announce it to the people, who thought him (and with justice) a man of most austere life. One day he had eaten some chicken, in the neighbourhood of Assisi, and when he reached the gates, he made his companion put a rope round his neck and drag him through the city, shouting in the tones of the public executioner: "Here is the throat that has been eating chicken in secret." Another time, with greater discretion, he contented himself with announcing to his hearers, without rope and a public crier, that that Francis whom they took for a saint had, during the whole of Advent, eaten food cooked in fat.

These eccentricities were not merely a refinement of novelty, or an excess of scrupulous sincerity. He had recourse to them because he thought himself still a little weak on that side. The pride to which he had been a slave in his worldly youth had not been entirely expelled. So he accused himself of it publicly, and always of set purpose; but he naturally produced just the opposite effect. He was admired and praised all the more. Perhaps, though he did not realize it, the old Adam burst forth in these performances

that were intended to bury him for ever. None the less it was given to Francis to overcome completely the inconsistencies of his ascetic virtuosity.

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BETWEEN the various halting-places on his missionary journeys Francis remained alone with his companion. And the solitude was most perfect when from the plain and hills of Umbria and the Marches rose the mountains of Gubbio, Nocera, and Norcia.

This solitude was very dear to Francis. He had begun as a hermit at San Damiano and the Porziuncola, and the vocation was never far from his mind. He had succeeded in overcoming the temptation, for his Brothers' sake and his own, in the delicious oasis of Orte, on the way from Pope Innocent's court. Later on, we are told, he was again tempted, and it needed the frankly unfavourable opinion of Brother Silvestro and Sister Clare to help him to overcome it once again. But he did not conquer without showing it some slight indulgence.

The saintly hermit soon develops into the prophet, meaning by "prophet," following the example of Hebrew prophets, one sent by God to the people. And it is precisely the people that drag the hermit from his cave, because they want to see him, listen to him, and touch him, and the hermit must finally give way. But the prophet, the emissary of God, needs no external compulsion to withdraw into solitude from time to time: it is an inner impulse that drives him thither. The force that upholds him among his people

and puts into his mouth the words that sway them and win them over, is not inspired by the people: he finds it in his secret self, alone with God. Solitude is for the prophet like contact with the earth for Antæus in the fable, it is the perennial fount of inspiration, and the refreshment of repose. The inner necessity that forces the prophet to confront the world and subject it to the divine word is for him not a little painful: crowds are burdensome, when they applaud him, not less than when they abuse him, sometimes even more. Only the imperious command of the Spirit can induce him to submit daily to such a contact. But if such a command is to be obeyed, there must be intervals of repose.

Francis of Assisi was no Jeremiah, and there was nothing tragic about his prophesying; the homely kindliness of his character made him sympathize with the people; the joyous warmth of his feelings made his own soul expand in their midst. Yet he too knew the prophets' conflict of soul: he too needed every now and then to be alone. He could, for a few moments, isolate himself among a crowd, pulling his hood over his eyes and remaining absorbed in ecstasy; but these moments were not enough.

He did not, however, seek solitude solely or mainly for the sake of such ecstatic favours, which did not play an influential part in his religious life, at least in the latter part of it. He was still the same Francis who, during his first mental struggles, or even before them, loved long rambles on the slopes of Subasio, in sight of the mountains and the plain. He left his fellow men, but not to shut himself up in some ascetic prison. He substituted for their company

that of trees and animals; the spacious horizons of earth and heaven took the place of populous city squares and elaborate buildings.

Even when he was among his own companions, at the Porziuncola, he would be seized with the desire to go away for a short time. On some occasions a retirement into the woods was enough; at other times he felt the need of going farther off. Subasio was full of such retreats, and one of them is particularly prominent in the traditions: the *Carceri.* Where there is today a modest convent, rather over two thousand feet up, half-way between Assisi and the summit of the mountain, there was then nothing but a sort of natural cave. A mule-track led into a hollow in the side of the mountain; a thick wood dominates a precipice hollowed out by a torrent, which for a long time has been almost dry (curious legends have grown up about this torrent). From a distance that splash of green on the face of an almost bare mountain wall may well give an impression of wildness and desolation. From near at hand the impression is quite different. The wood that envelops the sloping walls of the mountain lends a note of gay colour to the scene; and here and there the sunlight breaks through the trees, a soft light, but clear and cheerful. In this triangular frame, plain and mountains seem inextricably interwoven in a diaphanous grey-blue haze, over which the sky spreads its canopy of deeper blue. If you go down the trap-door under the little chapel and make your way into the hollow in the rock where the Saint slept, even there, through a little window, the light penetrates and sheds its cheerfulness.

The Saint's retreats were inhabited by God and His angels, but devils were not wanting. Yet in the retreats of Saint Francis (as, for the most part, in his life) the Devil's appearances are infrequent. Certain temptations (for Francis was a man and a young one) the Saint repelled by using the discipline a little, or, more drastically, by flinging himself into snow or briars, or, more in the Franciscan manner, by some jest: as, for instance, once in the winter he went out of his cell and made a number of figures out of snow to represent the family he might have had by yielding to temptation; and then he ironically invited himself to maintain them all. Sometimes his inner temptations were accompanied by diabolical noises in his ears; once, and once only, he felt a blow upon his head. But, on the whole, the demons were truly harmless compared with those of Saint Anthony and in the Thebaid. Saint Francis was an Italian saint, of Italy in the twelfth century, full of healthy and joyous life. And Umbria is not the Thebaid: frightful monsters would be out of place in such a country.

Another hermitage of Brother Francis (of which, in this case, there is the very best evidence) was on one of the three islands on Lake Trasimene. The tradition points to the Isola Maggiore, opposite Passignano, where in later times a Franciscan convent was built, now transformed into the Villa Isabella belonging to the Marquises Guglielmi. There were only a few families of fishermen in the neighbourhood, and they could be induced to keep two or three kilometres away from the island and leave the Saint alone. The clear and limpid waters of the lake cut Francis off from

human intercourse, and accorded with the purity of his own spirit. Sometimes the waters were troubled by violent storms, but not often. Generally they stretched away calm and motionless, mirroring the wooded hills and gaunt mountains, where mediæval fortresses and solitary towers stood out like brown stains against the green. Not a touch of merely sensual grace or savage desolation: only the diffused azure of the waters, the mountains, and the sky; and the vast peace of God.

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On Isola Maggiore Francis found an unusual companion in his solitude: a rabbit. The Saint managed to overcome the particular wildness of these little animals. And after the rabbit of Isola Maggiore came, later on, the hare of Greccio in the valley of Rieti. A Brother had caught it in a snare, and brought it back thus imprisoned.

"Little Brother Hare," said the Saint, full of pity, "and who has played you such a cruel trick? Come to me." And the hare, set free, leapt into his lap and crouched there.

His love of animals was infinite and knew no exceptions – the fly alone he would hold up as a detestable example to lazy Brethren. Lambs driven bleating to the market touched his heart, and he would rescue them by selling his cloak, even at the cost of shivering with cold. If a fisherman offered him fish, caught that very instant and still quivering, he would make haste to restore them to life by putting them back in the water. He had honey and wine fed to the bees in winter so that they might not die of cold. In his

character human pity and a lively religious imagination were closely connected: the lambs reminded him of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and a sheep seen on one occasion in the midst of a herd of goats looked to him like the Divine Master among the Pharisees and Chief Priests. He found a kindly merchant to ransom the sheep (for he and his companion had nothing but their habits), and led it about after him, until he could present it to the bishop in the next city to which he came. Even insects and the like reminded him of Jesus, who had said of Himself by the mouth of the Psalmist: "I am a worm, and no man"; and when he came upon one in the road, he would put it on one side so that it should not be trodden on.

Saint Francis loved beasts, and beasts loved him, because love calls to love, and animals are living creatures too, and capable of love. They loved him, followed him about, and listened to him. Robin-redbreasts perched on his table and pecked up the crumbs, and brought their young to be looked after by the Brothers. A pheasant that had been given to him grew accustomed to living in his company; and when they were parted it would not eat. In one of his mountain retreats he made friends with a falcon, which woke him up with its screams in the morning; but if the Saint was tired and ill, it let him sleep. At the Porziuncola a grasshopper ran up at the sound of his voice, and at his word of command it would pour out its shrill song in praise of God, and would return to its nest only at the word of the Saint. But if the grasshopper sang when it was told to, the swallows of Alviano (between Amelia and Orvieto) were

silent in like case, although the surrounding trees were full of their nests, so that the Saint could make himself heard by the people of the town.

The beasts too were God's creatures, and they too desired to hear his word. One day Francis was travelling on the plains of Foligno, and, having left Cannara, was making for Bevagna, which lies under what seems almost like a celestial cloud hovering at the foot of the hills, from the heights of which Montefalco watches over Umbria below. He happened to be walking through a meadow in which there were a large number of birds, from the gentle dove to the homely crow. At the Saint's approach they did not fly away as they usually do, and they appeared to welcome his greeting to his "brother birds." So the Saint began to preach to them: "My little brothers, praise God often and love him always. He gave you feathers to clothe you, and wings to fly, and all that you need to live. He has favoured you above all his creatures by giving you the pure air for your home. And he cares for you lovingly, so that you lack for nothing, and need not sow nor reap." The creatures stood still and attentive, with their wings open and tense, stretching out their necks towards the man of God. He went among them, touching them with his habit as he passed, blessed them, and sent them away; and they flew off with joyful cries. It was the best sermon of God's wayfarer, who knew and said that all creatures, so far as in them lay, served their Creator better than man.

All created things, not only animals that can move, or plants that have life, but things that most people regard as

inanimate, fire, air, water, and even earth and stones, were, for him, brothers and sisters. He told the gardener not to dig up the whole garden for vegetables, but to leave a strip of earth where flowers could be sown or let them grow of themselves. He forbade the Brothers who were collecting wood to cut the tree down to the root, so that it might grow up once more. He hated to put out a flame or a torch, so great was his pleasure in the cheerful, vigorous splendour of the fire, and his gratitude for its fraternal beneficence. All the more exalted was his joy when he contemplated the celestial luminaries, sun, moon, and stars.

This love of nature in Francis, which sometimes bordered on eccentricity (it was related that on one occasion he let a garment burn, so as not to have to put out the fire), was certainly not a pagan worship of nature, nor a taste for pastoral Arcady; nor was it either (as some maintain) merely symbolical mysticism. The lamb was Jesus, the fire and the torch stood for eternal light, the flowers made him think of the Messianic flower that had blossomed on the stem of Jesse, and the rocks he walked over so reverently reminded him of the Rock that is Christ. But nature did not disappear into the symbol; nor was the symbol always present in his mind. All the creatures of the universe were for him something divine, the handiwork and manifestation of a divine nature that was an enlargement of life, an all-embracing providence, an immediate and joyful presence. For colours, forms, movements, sounds, and perfumes found in Francis an exquisite sensibility, a quick imagination, and a mind free from the incubus of asceticism. He

had eyes to see and ears to hear, and pretended no otherwise; he admired visible beauty, without feeling any particular need to put it a grade lower than spiritual beauty, because for him sense and spirit were one. It was the same feeling that had drawn the artists away from their elaborate flat decorations back to sculpture in the round; substituted the forms of creatures and objects, exactly observed and reproduced, in place of fantastic and symbolical monsters and geometrical convolutions; and in the reality thus reconquered expressed the life and faith of a whole people.

CHAPTER TEN

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"CHRIST'S LADY"

"ALL THE BROTHERS, WHEREVER THEY ARE AND WHEREVER they go, are to avoid the evil looks and the company of women; they shall not speak with them or walk with them alone, nor eat with them from the same plate at table. . . . Nor are the Brothers to receive the vow of obedience from any woman, without exception. They are to confine themselves to giving her advice as the Spirit shall direct them, and she shall go and do penance where she wishes."

Thus it is written in the Rule of 1221 (the so-called first Rule, which is not in fact the first Rule). In the original Rule of 1210, submitted to Pope Innocent, there was certainly nothing of the kind: not only because of its extreme simplicity and brevity, but also owing to the fact that in those early times such considerations were certainly not contemplated by Father Francis. The weak may need rules, but the strong must have the freedom of the spirit that inspires.

On the night of March 18–19, 1212, between Palm Sunday and Holy Monday, the light of a torch was seen in the wood of the Porziuncola where it joined the road to Assisi. Francis and the Brothers, on going to investigate, met a lady who had fled from her house to take refuge among them. She was a young woman of eighteen years called Clare, of noble family both on her father's and on

her mother's side. The former was dead, and the girl was under the guardianship of her uncle Monaldo. Her mother, Ortolana, was a very devout lady: she had made three pilgrimages, to Rome to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, to the Church of St. Michael the Archangel on Mount Gargano, and, greatest and most arduous of all, to the Holy Land. Her daughter had grown up at her side in an atmosphere of intensely religious feeling and deep human sympathy. Even in her earliest youth she had loved the endless repetitions of the paternoster, whose monotonous cadences lull the spirit into religious somnolence; and from the legend of one of the Fathers of the desert she had learnt to count them upon pebbles. But she was also very charitable to his poor, and would even give away her own food.

Clare had visited Brother Francis and had heard him preach. The little parvenu trader, spendthrift and conceited, whom her noble parents had certainly regarded with disapproval, had changed under her very eyes (she was twelve years old when the conversion of Francis began) into a saint. The impression made upon the young girl's soul, burning with youth and mysticism, was a very powerful one. She wished to talk to him and listen to his advice; and she visited him several times secretly in the company of a young girl relative, Bona di Guelfuccio. The mother, it appears, knew nothing of the matter. Religious as she might be, her views for her daughter's future were the same as those of her other relations, beginning with her guardian, Monaldo: the time to make a good marriage had arrived. Ortolana herself had done as much in her time.

But Francis' advice was different. He found a kindred soul in Clare – the same thirst for freedom, the same fervent charity, the same inflexible will. All this combined with a pure and fresh feminine spirit, which lent its fragrance to the apostolic life. She was a sister sent by God, and he could not but welcome her: she, too, was a true follower of Christ, and Francis did in fact call her "Christ's Lady."

Her relatives were anxious to hasten the marriage, because she was now eighteen years old, just the right age. No other remedy was left but flight. Francis, who had never known worldly prudence, constituted himself the girl's abductor, in the name of God. In accordance with his instructions, Clare appeared once more in public, in her finest clothes, on the morning of Palm Sunday, going to the Cathedral of San Rufino to hear Mass said by the Bishop and receive the olive-branch from his hands. The poor girl, on the point of abandoning her family for ever (her mother and sisters, of one of whom she was particularly fond), was at the end of her strength; and when they all went up to the altar to take the olive-branch from the hands of Bishop Guido, she stayed in the family seat. The Bishop himself went down and gave the olive-branch to the noble and pious damsel.

That night, in the company of Bona's sister, Pacifica (Bona was in Rome on a pilgrimage), she left the house, not by the main door; secrecy was essential, and that would have been dangerous, and perhaps impossible, because it would have been guarded. She went out by the "door of

death." To this day the traveller may notice in old houses at Assisi, Gubbio, and other cities of central Italy, at some distance from the main door, another and smaller door, a little above the level of the ground, and walled up. It seems that the dead were carried out by this door, owing to a superstitious fear; for the rest of the time it remained closed and barred. Clare and Pacifica went out by this door, clearing away the obstacles with laborious and feverish energy. Then they turned, in the solitude and darkness of the now passing night, to the Porziuncola, where Francis was awaiting them. By going quickly, and taking short cuts, they could cover the distance in less than half an hour.

At the edge of the wood were the Brothers carrying torches to welcome them and light up the way, and they escorted her to the chapel. Standing before the ancient picture of the Madonna, Clare made her vows to Francis, who with his own hands cut her hair and let it fall upon the ground about her, and arranged her in the peasant's habit of the Friars Minor. But the young girl could not stay among the Brothers: Francis' emancipation of spirit did not go so far as that, nor can one be surprised. When the ceremony of investiture was over, to the accompaniment of prayers and hymns and devout rejoicing, the Father conducted Clare to the Benedictine monks of St. Paul, a monastery just outside Isola Romanesca, a wide stretch of country-side (today called Bastia) thirty minutes' journey from Santa Maria degli Angeli, in the green bosom of the Umbrian plain. It lies at the confluence of the Tescio, the torrent that winds along the valley below Assisi, and the Chiascio,

which flows down from the mountains of Gubbio, and hurries down, often swollen and turbid, to flow into the Tiber a little higher up, under the isolated hill of Torgiano. The monastery, a very rich one, stood where the cemetery lies today, and all that remains of it is the little church, which actually belongs to the time of St. Clare, or even a century or so earlier.

The Benedictines of San Paolo were consenting parties to this pious abduction: a further proof of the friendly relations between Minorites and Benedictines. But they had some reason for being alarmed when, in the course of the next day, her relatives got on the tracks of the fugitive and made their way to her cloistral retreat, so unused to storms of this kind. Clare ran to take refuge in the church, and clung to the altar (the ultimate protection in those times), thence displaying to her relations her shaven head, as a sign that all was finished. For several days they stormed and prayed and wept, but all to no purpose. The institution of the family was on their side; but spiritual freedom was on the other side, and was in accord with canon law, which was the decisive argument. Clare was more than fourteen years old, and her vows, made, as they had been, to the head of a recognized Order, were valid.

Still Francis thought it better (and very likely these same monks of St. Paul preferred it) to convey Clare to a more remote refuge, though not very much farther off: to the other Benedictine monastery of Sant' Angelo in Panso. This establishment was situated below the larger Benedictine house, San Benedetto del Subasio, about half-way

between it and the road to Spello. The buildings have entirely disappeared by now, and a farmhouse has taken its place. It is in a solitary spot, with a view over the warm and coloured plain of Foligno, between the olives and cypresses; the distance from Assisi is less than that from Bastia, hardly three-quarters of an hour from the Porta Nuova.

Clare's relations lost no time in following her, and in fact appeared there a few days after her arrival; but they were in pursuit, not so much of Clare herself, as of her sister Agnes, who was a few years younger. They had always been deeply attached to each other and in perfect sympathy; and Agnes must certainly have known of her sister's plans. Perhaps she had not at first had the courage to tear herself away from her mother; but once she had lost Clare, life without her became unendurable, and her example irresistible. Sixteen days after Clare's departure, Agnes fled to Sant' Angelo in Panso, and Clare was transformed from a novice into an abbess.

Clare's family felt the second blow even more than the first. Perhaps it was not merely a question of family affection, domestic authority, and aristocratic prestige; there were pressing material considerations too, because these girls, who had gone to follow in Brother Francis' footsteps, did like the rest of his company: they sold their share of the family inheritance to distribute among the poor, and in this way they broke up the family patrimony, without the compensation of rich and aristocratic marriages. Monaldo, at the head of a body of twelve men, appeared at the monastery, and, saying that he wished to put matters in order,

obtained admittance. Once inside, Monaldo told Agnes (Clare, as has been seen, they had already given up) to return home. Agnes answered that she wished to remain with her sister. Then they had recourse to violence, and dragged her by the hair out on to the road. Unable to resist, Agnes turned to her sister for help, but she could do nothing except pray to God with silent tears. Suddenly the ravishers stopped and abandoned their victim. The story goes that Agnes' body grew rigid and so heavy that they could not drag it any farther.

Agnes stayed with her sister, and Francis cut off her hair likewise and received her into the obedience. Then he began to consider how to find a dwelling-place for his two female recruits, and for the others that would come after – and they came very soon. Clare was not at ease in the convent of another Order, whose life was in many ways different from that which she intended to live. The Bishop of Assisi also understood the necessity of making proper provision for them, and treated them as ladies who had left their family. These young girls could not go wandering about like Francis and his Brothers, and San Damiano was assigned to them as their dwelling-place. Thus the place in which Francis had taken his first step on the way of the Gospel became the retreat of those who were called "Poor Ladies." Francis' sense of chivalry thought it proper that the title of distinction should be combined with the name already borne by the Friars Minor.

Clare and her companions had sworn obedience to Francis and he was their head no less than of his own

Brothers. He gave them the Rule, and began by promising them his support: " Since, by divine inspiration, you have become daughters and handmaids of the Highest, of Our Father in heaven, and become espoused to the Holy Spirit, choosing to live the life of the Gospel, I desire and I promise, on my own behalf and on that of my Brothers, to take diligent and particular care of you, as of them." The fundamental point was to live the apostolic life of poverty, in accordance with divine inspiration. There were, indeed, further and more precise instructions regarding fasts and abstinence (which were fairly rigorous), more numerous than for the Brothers. We know no more than this about the Rule given to them by Francis. Pope Innocent, who had granted Francis his authority to live in accordance with the Gospel, now to Clare likewise, this time in writing, allowed the " privilege of poverty."

As a matter of fact, the life of the Poor Ladies could be summed up in two words: prayer and work. In those early days they obtained the necessaries of life by the work of their hands, and the Brothers helped them, for the Sisters stayed at home at San Damiano and could not go about begging alms from door to door. Moreover, they took no part in the Franciscan missionary preaching, and female sermons thus remained an eccentricity of the heretics. This did not necessarily mean a schism from the original Franciscan ideal: apostolic poverty was no longer bound up with apostolic preaching, nor found therein its highest meaning and ultimate aim, but acquired a value of its own. The element of renunciation prevailed over that of con-

quest: it was a return to traditional asceticism. The first Franciscan convent, small, poor, but still a convent, and thus more definitely cut off from the world than were the Brothers, was that of San Damiano. In another matter, however, the first Sisters of Clare shared in the Franciscan activity: the care of the sick. They were brought to San Damiano, and the Sisters looked after them for the love of God, just as Francis and his Brothers had done for the lepers of Assisi, or in the other hospitals that they came to on their journeys.

Soon convents of Poor Ladies came into existence in other places besides Assisi. Francis does not seem to have been much concerned with them; for him San Damiano remained a place apart: Clare was his sister who soothed and counselled him in moments of doubt and anxiety; and more than once Francis came to San Damiano as to a place of refuge and refreshment for his weary soul and ailing body. He would have come even more often if he had had only to consider Clare and himself; but on this point he believed he ought to yield to common opinion. He had to realize that all men, even all the Brothers, were not like him; considerable caution was necessary as an example to the rest. None of the Brothers were allowed to visit the Sisters of Clare when they pleased: only the most spiritual and sedate, chosen by the higher authorities, were to frequent their company.

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FULL NETS

BETWEEN THE FOUNDATION OF WHAT WAS CALLED THE Second Order (1212) and Francis' journey to the East (1219) came the period of silent and rapid development of the Friars Minor. Recruits poured in from every side, and communities came into existence in the remotest parts of Italy, spreading later into the various countries of Europe. The sun, which had risen at Assisi, climbed quickly up the heavens and filled all the earth with its radiance.

In 1216 the Friars Minor were already scattered over the country from Lombardy to Sicily. The times in which the little bands of Brothers journeyed about Umbria, the Marches, and Tuscany, and after a few days returned to their one fixed abode, the Porziuncola, had now passed away for ever. New centres and meeting-places inevitably came into existence, although they did not yet happen to be called convents (the word always remained unknown to Francis). The Father laid down, with authority and precision, the way of life for the new communities. If some kindly soul could be found, in whatever city it might be, to give the necessary land for a dwelling-place for the Fathers, then, before proceeding further, they were to go before the bishop, the father and master of souls, and ask for his blessing and approval. Francis would never have anything to do with papal privileges, which withdrew his Brothers

from episcopal authority, not only because of his dislike for any privilege, or, rather, because of his principle of attaching no value to the law and its weapons; but also because he believed he could more easily obtain the goodwill of the clergy by remaining in submission to them, without attempting to restrict their authority, or diminish their powers by competing with them in their pastoral activities. When the bishop's permission was obtained, the land was accepted: for use alone, it need hardly be said, and not in ownership. They were to accept only the exact amount necessary for their wooden and earthern huts, with a small garden in which they could grow a portion of their supplies, the whole enclosed with a fence (never a wall). The church must be small and plain, and adapted solely to the use of the Brothers, not for the accommodation of the surrounding population. It was desirable that the Brothers should use other churches in which to preach. They had won more souls by poverty and humility than by preaching. The virtue of example, the act rather than the word, was one of Francis' fundamental principles: and the more the Order increased, the more he himself thought to govern it by the example of his life rather than by words and commands.

The new groups of Brothers in the various provinces had for their head a " Minister " or rather, to use Francis' constant designation, a " Minister and Servant." The choice of these words arose, in fact, from a Gospel text: " I did not come to be served, but to serve (*non veni ministrari, sed ministrare*)." The titles of Prior and Abbot were entirely

forbidden, as implying superiority and importance. "None shall call himself Prior," says the so-called Rule of 1221, which in fact grew up from 1210 onwards, in accordance with the needs of the community; "but all without exception shall call themselves Friars Minor; and one shall wash the feet of another." Nor was this merely a symbol, but an instruction to be taken literally: the Minister, as Christ did for His Apostles, was to wash the Brothers' feet, and look at his office in this light, regarding himself as of no more and no less importance than this humble activity. To show a desire to obtain this position, or resign it because it was disagreeable, was for Francis a sure sign of an anti-Franciscan – that is, an anti-apostolic – spirit.

In compensation, the Brothers were to obey with promptitude, and without reserve; and they were to sacrifice their private judgment, when they thought it would be better to do otherwise. In the matter of obedience Francis sometimes used rather strong language and employed rather violent figures of speech. The well-known *perinde ac cadaver* of the Jesuits was anticipated in an address to the Brothers: "Take a corpse and put it where you will: it does not resist, or grumble, or complain: if you put it in a chair, it does not look up, but down; if you clothe it in purple, it only looks twice as pale as before." It is Francis' most ascetic, most "mediæval" discourse; and we should not say that it represents his general attitude of mind, though we must not pass over the fact that the motive of passive obedience is here accompanied by that of a humility indifferent to honours. The rule of 1221 contains a less

rigid conception of obedience: "The Brothers shall obey in matters affecting the salvation of the soul, and such as are not contrary to our way of life" – in other words to the apostolic and Franciscan life. The proviso as to matters affecting the soul excludes every despotic caprice: while to find out whether the Minister's order was contrary to the Franciscan life or not, the Brother could only use his intellect to judge. And authority was mutual between superior and inferiors. If the Minister was ill, if he "walked after the way of the flesh and not of the spirit," the Brothers were to admonish him three times (another precept from the Gospels), and if he did not mend his ways, denounce him to Francis at the Chapter of Pentecost. For above the local, or, rather, provincial community and its Minister came, without further intermediary, the head of the Order, Francis himself, and the general assembly of all the Brethren. There were no intervening hierarchical grades, and hence the Father's authority was all the more powerful.

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The Porziuncola remained the centre of the order, or of the "Religion," as it was then called by Francis and the rest. New Brothers were received there and there only; Francis was there and could judge aspirants in person. He was guided in the matter by inner light alone; and sometimes he would harshly reject one who knelt before him weeping and begging to be received. "Your grief is of the flesh, and your heart is not with God," he said on one occasion to a young man who came from Lucca; and he,

making no further objection, hearing that some members of his household were outside to take him back, departed in their company.

Everything had its source and origin at the Porziuncola, which Francis wanted to be "the rule and example of the whole Religion"; not only for admission to the Order. The Porziuncola and Rivotorto had been the meeting-place for his first followers after their apostolic journeys; when the Brothers increased and multiplied, Francis wanted them all still to meet there, at least once a year, at Pentecost (a second, less important reunion, perhaps of the Brothers from the neighbourhood, was held on St. Michael's day, September 29). By 1216 the Chapters of Pentecost were already an established institution, one of the most original institutions of Francis. Through them he combined the control of admission to the Order with a personal surveillance and influence, by his words and example, over all the Brothers. Thus, a few days or weeks before Pentecost, according to the distance, the Brothers from every community set out on their way. From the two opposite ends of Italy long lines of grey habits moved along the roads to Assisi; and those who came from Lombardy were accompanied by the Brothers from France and Germany. They travelled on foot, as the Rule enjoined, throughout their journey, which was not a short one, and for some was very long indeed. In the first years of youthful enthusiasm they looked on it as a holiday to travel along in company, with Brothers who knew and loved each other, talking of Father Francis, whom they were soon to see again. Some of them,

too, were to see him for the first time, for the postulants naturally attached themselves to the Brothers. And not merely the Father; there would be some Brother whom they had known at the time of their admission to the Order, or on another occasion, and with whom they had grown specially intimate.

Such was the journey itself for these Brothers, most of them young, cheerful, and enthusiastic, with its experience of new countries and famous cities, its continual change of scenery, and its little adventures. It was all a fresh, varied, and intense pleasure. To these early Brothers the journey to Assisi for the Chapter of Pentecost represented what the Easter pilgrimage to Jerusalem was for the Jews. They talked joyfully among themselves, and sang psalms and hymns in chorus; from time to time they said nothing for a while, savouring in silence the free air, the green plains, the azure of the mountains and the sky. At last they came down into the plain of Assisi. The towers of the city, taller than any others in the district, the campanili of the churches (and tallest and most majestic of all, that of San Rufino) were visible from far off against the dark background of Subasio. Their hearts began to beat more quickly; their weariness vanished and they quickened their step. And there among the huts of earth and wood was the dark and humble chapel in which they had been admitted by Francis to the Order. Every moment of that solemn hour came before their memory once more. And last of all *he* came, he himself; he returned their salutation of peace and blessed the Brothers one by one as they came and knelt before him,

placing his hand upon their heads, and then raised them up and embraced them.

At Pentecost the spring in flower raised its pæan over the vast and fertile plain. The temperature was mild and even rather warm. The days were spent in the open air; the Mass, celebrated by one priest for all the company, was followed by the multitude of Brothers, gathered together outside the chapel, in devout silence. Then, in the open air, Father Francis began to talk, in the tones of one talking to his friends, until his words began to grow hot and impetuous. He enjoined upon them loyalty to the apostolic life, and above all to holy poverty, he exhorted them to love their neighbour, and he described the mission laid by God upon the Friars Minor. God wanted to hasten the conversion of the world: the new age was not far off. It was because He had inspired him, Francis, to turn to the apostolic life, the life of Christ and His Apostles, and had sent him the Brothers as his disciples, that, by God's grace, they were now gathered together. By practising the apostolic life they would set an example to all, clerics and laymen. Example was more valuable than any sermon. It was, above all, by example that they would bring Christian men to observe God's commandments, and conquer the world for the Gospel and the life of the Gospel. And by their poverty, their toil, and their dependence upon charity they would show men how they might acquire grace in the sight of God. On the Day of Judgment the Lord would take account of how people had behaved to the "little" Friars Minor.

After this came the assemblies. The Ministers reported

to Francis the work of their communities, their condition and their needs. But they were not the only ones to speak: every Brother was free to say anything he thought might be of service and even (as we have seen) to accuse his own Minister for not having acted in accordance with the spirit of the apostolic life.

They discussed particular cases, laid down general rules which experience had proved to be necessary, and which were incorporated in the "Rule." Francis spoke and gave judgment with sovereign authority: no one then dared to oppose him openly, even though they might not be convinced.

Public prayers, recited by Francis, concluded their labours, at midday and in the evening. They ate their food on the grass in the open air, sitting at their ease in scattered groups. They brought nothing and provided nothing in the way of food. Francis would not allow any preparations to be made from one day to another, because the Gospel said that they should take no thought for the morrow. And in fact they had no need to concern themselves in the matter. The citizens of Assisi and the peasants from the country round were eager to bring the Brothers more than they needed; and sometimes they had to send things back. Around the encampments of the Chapter surged a crowd of pious admirers, bringers of gifts, and the merely inquisitive: it was a great event, much talked of before and after, both at Assisi and throughout the Duchy, in Tuscany and the March, and even farther.

At the time of the midday meal the solemn and

mysterious peace of the blazing noontide hung over the plain in a kind of breathless ecstasy. In the evening the rose-white walls of the city, under the rays of the sinking sun, took on the splendid hues of precious stones; behind and above them glowed the crimson crags of Subasio. The Brothers thought of the heavenly Jerusalem of jewels and of gold, of which they had read, or heard read of, in St. John. When the evening prayers had been said, the Father gave his blessing to all, and they made ready to sleep. Their lodging consisted of improvised huts made of wooden boards, branches of trees, and earth: the woods and the surrounding fields provided the materials. It would not have been possible to make provision for the assembled crowds, and Francis would allow them no permanent and comfortable abode, such as convents and inns.

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In this way the head of the new Religion passed his followers in review, spoke to all of them, and listened to their doubts and needs. It was a joy not unaccompanied with anxieties.

As the Order grew, so difficulties, internal and external, increased. The strolling preachers were not always appreciated by priests and bishops; indeed sometimes, either in good faith or from hostile design, they were suspected of heresy. What the Bishop of Imola said on one occasion to Francis: "Brother, my preaching is all that my people need," was the natural feeling of all the clergy. And if the itinerant, improvised preaching showed signs of developing

into settled abodes and stationary communities, the suspicions of heresy had to be withdrawn, but the jealousy still made itself felt. There was here no question of the monasteries of the older Orders, in which the monks lived a life apart, without involving themselves in pastoral ministry. They had begun indeed to take part in it here and there, but in the country districts only; in the cities the secular clergy had hitherto had the monopoly. The Friars Minor, who had the air of wanting to compete with them, in those early times came and went, so to say, as they pleased, without letters of recommendation or privileges from Rome, with nothing but the verbal and general approval of their Rule by Pope Innocent, armed solely with their words and way of life. Francis thought these weapons the most effectual of all – indeed, irresistible. For the main lines of a radically revolutionary moral idealism they looked straight to him. But in the details of daily life, so difficult for both individuals and communities, and especially for a community that had to adapt itself within another larger and older than itself, while professing complete obedience to it, matters were different. In this way the Brothers, at the Chapters of Pentecost and on other occasions, came to confide in Francis, in addition to their successes, their disillusions and disputes. A solid grant of privilege from the Roman curia would have been just what was wanted to overcome the hostility of the clergy, but Francis would not hear of it. Once, in Lombardy, he discovered that his Brothers had obtained a privilege authorizing them to preach freely – that is, without having to ask permission

from the local authority time after time. He took a knife, slashed the parchment into the minutest strips, and flung them into the fire.

Then there were the difficulties inherent in the way of life itself. To live without a proper home, in hospitals and huts; to subsist on what they could earn from day to day by the labour of their hands, or by begging; never to accept money, but only food and other indispensables: all this was easy enough while their numbers were few and they lived in the open country, where space meant abundance and prevailed over the natural parsimony of man. But it became considerably more difficult when they formed numerous communities, and in the cities, in which even charity inevitably took the form of money, and the population was concentrated in larger houses. The very charity of the faithful, its very lavishness, was an embarrassment to the friars, while the donors must have found the prohibitions of the Rule very hard to understand, devoid of all practical, and indeed of common, sense.

In this way the apostolic life became rather less practicable, even if the spiritual temperature of the new recruits had been always equal to that of the first comers; and that, of course, it could not be. The first followers of Rivotorto and the Porziuncola were people who had followed Francis day by day, and were possessed by enthusiasm and admiration for his way of life. They had followed the man, not only for the attraction of his sanctity, but because they understood and shared the apostolic ideal; indeed, both motives were really, for them, combined in one. In the case

of the majority of those who were now so eager to join the Order the position was rather different. Francis was now followed by a horde of disciples, as he passed rapidly from place to place; or their ardour was aroused by his fame alone, and made more fervent by the sight and speech of his earliest disciples. They wanted to join his Order because he was a saint and so gave them an assurance that they would walk in the way of eternal life, together with a privileged position in this world. Some of them had no very exact conception of his ideal; more than one of them were quite simply of the opinion that this was a matter that concerned him, their chief, and him alone, with his superior intelligence. The apostolic life, in the view of many of the more recent recruits, had no very distinct outlines; and they were naturally led to judge of it by reference to the other orders.

The growth and development of the Order brought with it a medley of enthusiasts and hesitants, heroes and men of common sense, simple souls and philosophers, and mental digestions both vigorous and delicate. Francis had foreseen it all, and from the very beginning, when he had spoken to his early companions of a catch of fish that would be too abundant. He also said (according to the later reports of his companions) that at the beginning the recruits to the Order would all be like so many ripe and chosen fruits, sweet to the taste; later on they would be a little less sweet; and then they would become so harsh and bitter that no one would eat them. Francis would have liked to make a selection, and throw the less perfect fish back

into the water – that is, into the world whence they had come and to which they worthily belonged – and not spoil the savour of the apostolic life by bitter and rotten fruits. But even he found this impossible: and some contamination was inevitable.

From the very beginning, persons of very different social stations had joined Francis: we found a rich bourgeois, Bernardo; a Doctor of Laws and a canon of San Rufino, Pietro Cattani; and a priest, Silvestro. Among the earlier followers social status and professional habits were merged and fused together in the crucible of the vocation. The rich man entered into the Franciscan life because he wanted to abandon his wealth and taste the freedom of poverty. The man of law was glad to throw away his codices; it was just because he was tired of them that he had turned to the counsel of the Gospel. The merchant was sick of his transactions, and the noble of his splendour and his pride. But when disciples began to come forward in crowds, then this entire mergence of the man that had been in the man he became, this complete fusion under the unique Franciscan imprint, became rather more difficult of achievement. The rich man could still, like the earlier disciples, voluntarily abandon his riches; but it was not so easy for him, and all that came from good society, to accustom themselves to their social inferiors. The noble could not forget his nobility; he sometimes remembered it, though in silence, even in the very presence of Francis, the tradesman's son. Even less could the educated man, the learned professor, bring himself to feel the equal of his unlettered

colleague, and henceforward regard his learning as of no particular value for the Order. Still less could one man of learning get on with another: the philosopher and theologian, who had studied and knew by heart the doctrines of the Fathers, the *Maxims* of Peter the Lombard, and the commentaries on the Bible; and the canonist, hidebound in the papal decretals, that ruled the Christian world.

For these men of learning who flocked to the Order, the Franciscan renunciation of their previous profession was devoid of sense. They even thought they ought to bring their knowledge and experience to the service of the Order. To bring divine truths to the ignorant; to explain to the people the absurdity of heresy; to expound the Scriptures in accordance with the received Catholic interpretation, purged of the perversions of the Paterini and the Waldensians; to defend, with the code of canon law in their hands, the constitution of the Church and ecclesiastical liberty against the nobles, the commons, and the Empire: these were the privileges and duties of a religious Order.

Moreover, they appealed to the example of a quite recent Order, whose foundation was practically contemporary with that of Francis, the Dominicans. The Spanish Canon Regular, Dominic, already a saint in popular estimation (he was about ten years older than Francis), had placed himself entirely at the service of the Church militant. The Dominicans also went about preaching: they even took the name of "Preachers." But their discourses were not confined to the general precepts of the Gospels, nor did they disdain the help of holy eloquence and of theological

doctrine. Their work was definite and practical, and was more especially concerned with controverting heretics. And their Order was in process of establishing itself in accordance with one of the Rules already consecrated by tradition. They did not at that time profess absolute poverty, which seemed to make impossible the existence of any coherent and coördinated religious community, active in defence of the Church. And, judging from their example, it was thought that Father Francis would have been well advised to allow some modicum of private property to a multitude that had grown so great.

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But Francis at that time did not abandon any of his principles, he would not give way to any difficulty – indeed, he took no account of it. As at first, he felt himself inspired by God, destined by Him to convert the world; and in this faith he transfigured and ennobled that self-confidence and pride that had been characteristic of Francis while in the world. He was conscious of his ascendency over his Brethren and he had complete confidence in himself; he believed that he could make them fear him as much as a bishop or the Pope himself. He did not deviate from the apostolic rule of poverty revealed by God to him and to his disciples. As regards the aims and methods of the Order, the use of knowledge, the proper attitude to study and to men of learning, he knew quite clearly in his inner consciousness what he wanted and what he did not. But he found it difficult to explain this to the others in a clear and

persuasive manner; because the matters treated of were not always exact ideas, but states of mind and intimate spiritual dispositions. To own property or not, to go about preaching or to shut themselves in a convent, these were definite and palpable antitheses and decisions, even though a spiritual meaning was necessary to give them their religious value. But as regards knowledge, especially theological knowledge, Francis could not say, and did not think, that it was evil; he even professes to recognize its value. (It was written in his Testament: "We ought to honour and venerate all theologians and all those who administer the most holy words of God, because they are administering the spirit and the life.") Nor did he think of casting doubt upon the fact that to confute and to convert heretics was a meritorious act; and he did not think of disputing, even less of contesting, the rights and freedom of the Church. But that which divided him from the "scholars" and "politicians" of the Order was his preoccupation with matters of the spirit and a different idea of its functions. He did not deny the value of knowledge; but he feared the pride of men of learning; *Scientia inflat.* He believed that hearts are not to be converted by knowledge, but by simple words and the example of good works. Nor did he think that the Friars Minor were concerned with teaching the truth of dogmas which he held sacred, or with confuting the detestable errors of the heretics. Their task was to practise the apostolic virtues, and through them to bring men back to the morality of the Gospels, banishing from their hearts greed, anger, and sensuality, and making way for unselfishness, peace, and love.

His idea was that of a division of labour. To the clergy belonged the administration of the sacraments, which they alone could accomplish. To the clergy or to the other religious orders belonged dogmatic and theological instruction and the confutation of heretical errors. The ecclesiastical authorities were concerned with the defence of ecclesiastical rights, in accordance with their competence and their responsibility. He knew nothing of rights, and considered theology to be the business of others: God had assigned him as his field of action the moral life of individual consciences. And his method, to be effective, must be purely moral: no doctrinal allurements, nor juridical stiffening, nor the external influence of wealth and power, were to contribute to the result. For that reason he had not hitherto had recourse to the ecclesiastical authorities except for their simple authorization to carry out his work, or for advice and spiritual comfort, refraining from asking positive assistance. For that reason he had thus rigidly (one might almost say, fanatically) opposed, both for himself and his followers, any request for, or use of, papal privileges. The evil of the world was to be conquered by good alone. The spirit, and the spirit only, was to triumph over the flesh.

A grandiose and heroic and essentially logical conception; but difficult to work out in practice, because the world in which Francis and his companions lived was a world of social forces organized and systematized by law. Either they must abandon the world altogether and take refuge in the life of a hermit; or they must place in opposition to it another and completely coherent social organ-

ization; or they must come to terms with it. The first monks of the Eastern deserts had carried out the first possibility, centuries before; and even before them the Christian Church, in the midst of the pagan world, had realized the second alternative. But Francis could not ignore the society of the Roman Church, nor had he the least idea of placing another organization in opposition to it. His notion of the division of labour, which was more a feeling and a suggestion than a carefully analysed conception, could not be carried very far. The same ecclesiastical organization administered the sacramental life and controlled the moral life. Spirit and body, religion and rights, were closely combined. There was no middle path between opposing it and becoming completely enveloped by it, obeying all its behests and serving all its ends; between denying its authority and requesting its support. The first alternative had never occurred to Francis; the second he hesitated to accept.

The internal condition of the Order and its external relations called equally for a decision. The ill-humour and suspicions of the bishops, the hostility and derision of the common people, of which there had been instances in Italy, must have become increasingly frequent in other countries, where the Order was still making its way; and they could not conquer without the help of Rome. Sanction was not enough: support was essential. Moreover, the recurring disputes within the very centre of the Order made it clear that for Francis to imagine he could control it by his personal prestige alone was an illusion: that was not enough, and the Saint, notwithstanding his inspired conviction, in

the face of open and obstinate resistance, began to hesitate, from fear of "scandal," a fear which was always very present with him. Francis thought matters over, and his thoughts, as always happened, took the form of a dream. He saw a small black hen, with an infinite number of chicks running round her, looking for shelter under the maternal wings. The hen had tried to make room for them all under her, but her wings were not large enough. "I am the hen," Francis thought; "the chicks are my Brothers, the larger wings that are needed are those of the Holy Roman Church. Her power will keep the enemies of the Order at a distance and allow it to live in peace and freedom. And even within the Order she will put an end to discontent. As the inheritor of the Gospel, the Church shall be the first to acknowledge that in my Order the apostolic virtues of poverty and humility are maintained in all their purity."

CHAPTER TWELVE

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THE CARDINAL

THE CURIA WAS STILL CONSIDERING THE RELATIONS BE-tween the new Order and the Roman Church: both sides had established contact, though that did not necessarily imply any identity of purpose. The Roman curia and Francis naturally could not look at matters from the same point of view. The Brother of Assisi thought only how he might preserve his work, not indeed solely from motives of selfish satisfaction, but because this work had been entrusted to him by Providence. For the curia, even Francis and his Order were only one part of that whole which was called the Roman Church; and its attention was directed more to the greater advantage of the Church and the Papacy, with which it was one and indivisible. The establishment at last of a firm and definite discipline in the Franciscan Order was even more favoured at Rome than by Francis himself; but the aim and content of the discipline were rather differently understood. For the one side it would mean only the preservation of the "apostolic life" in all its integrity, founded on the principles of poverty and non-resistance to evil; the other side were mainly concerned to make the order as perfectly adapted as possible to the needs of the times and to turn it into a willing and effective instrument for the purposes of the Church, in the struggles of various kinds that she would have to undergo. A rigid stabilization

of the Franciscan ideals did not seem, at Rome, either practicable or opportune. The order was to become something rather less original, but more practical, efficient, and easier to handle.

The first encounter between the two points of view took place at Florence near the end of May, 1217. At the Chapter of Pentecost, on the 14th of May, a new and important step had been taken in the direction of the expansion of the Order: the " oversea missions " had been discussed, for the conversion of the infidel Mussulmans. They had set out for the East, for Tunis and Morocco. Francis, for his part, so that he might not be staying at home while his Brothers went far off into hostile countries, contemplated a journey to France. He professed a special attraction for that country, because the French had a special devotion for the Body of Christ, which made them much akin to himself in religious feeling, for the Eucharist was the centre of his inner life with God. This was the considered motive evolved by his religious consciousness; but behind it there must have been an unconscious reawakening of memories of his earliest years. It was the country that he had visited with his father as a boy, and he had learnt the language, which frequently came to his lips in moments of great emotion. Possibly the news which had been coming in for years regarding the devastation of the lovely land of Provence was an unspeakable torment to his Christian mind and kindly heart; perhaps, abandoning his usual custom, he contemplated going thither to preach peace to the very armies themselves and to their commanders, and so,

by converting all the heretics, take away any pretext for the ruin of the land.

He set forth, and got as far as Florence, knowing that he should find there a legate of the Holy See, Ugolino Conti, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia. It was Francis' principle, wherever he stopped, to go and pay his respects to the ecclesiastical authorities. He was well acquainted with clerical precedence: the Pope's legate, wherever he might be, was the highest authority. Francis went to make his bow to Cardinal Ugolino; and perhaps he was drawn to him by the recollection of the kindness of his kinsman, Pope Innocent. The latter had died at Perugia the year before, and Francis had happened to be present at his death, marvelling once more at the transitoriness of human greatness, when he saw him alone and abandoned by everyone, left at the mercy of robbers who despoiled of its ornaments the corpse of one who, until a few months before, had dominated the world.

Francis' visit, though he did not know it, was very welcome to the Cardinal, who for some time had followed with much interest the career of the Saint of Assisi, and the development of his Order. In the long interview that followed, two dominating characters found themselves face to face. One had all the confidence of inspiration, softened and curbed, but not weakened, by a tender human kindness, a profound Christian humility, and the respectful obedience of a good Catholic. The other combined sincere and profound piety with a consciousness, as obstinate as Francis' own inspiration, of the right and duty of the Roman Church to govern the world for the salvation of souls

and to the greater advantage of humanity. He brought to the service of this conviction an iron will, a penetrating intellect, an inexhaustible eloquence, with all the range of political devices and diplomatic sagacity at the disposal of a Cardinal of the curia, grown old in the interplay of Roman politics. From this first interview Francis got the impression that in his heart Ugolino regarded him with sincere understanding and true respect; nor was he mistaken. The Cardinal's piety, obscured but not stifled by the daily round, had found in the soul of the Umbrian Brother a fresh spring of inspiration that relieved his own parched mind; and he had quite decided to protect this clear and tranquil current in the majestic river of the Roman Church. Ugolino had seen in a flash, with the eye of the expert in human character, what might be got from Francis and what might be feared from him. To leave him entirely to himself or openly to assert authority over him would have been equally fatal errors. It was necessary to observe his doings with the greatest care, so as to help and guide him, protect and control him: to respect his inspiration and to appeal to his humility, to leave his ideals intact and adapt them to practical necessities, in the name of obedience to the Church and her best interests.

Ugolino saw more clearly than any other the importance, and even the necessity, of Franciscan help for the Church. He was perfectly well acquainted with the situation both within and without and he kept his eyes fixed on future developments. He knew that the Church was threatened by three dangers: the ferment of heresy; the spirit

of independence and absolutism among the communes, which expressed itself in a tax on Church property and privileges; and the rivalry of the Empire. As a matter of fact, the Church's relations with the latter were, at the moment, idyllic: Frederick II, the "Priests' King," had entirely justified the contemptuous epithet of the rival candidate, Otto (still alive, but already defeated at Bouvines by Philip of France, and, for practical purposes, reduced to insignificance). Placed upon the throne of Germany by the agency of Pope Innocent, he had rewarded the Pontiff by the Treaty of Eger, the most advantageous that had ever been concluded between Church and Empire, and he kept faith with the treaty. This time the Church of Rome could produce a document indisputably recognizing her claims to Tuscany, the Duchy, and the Marches, and she could hope to establish herself finally in the possession of those lands which, thrust like a wedge between north and south Italy, prevented the territorial union of the Kingdom of Sicily with the Empire and constituted one of the main foundations of her independence and her temporal power. And yet Ugolino did not trust the "Priests' King"; like his great relative Innocent he looked on the Hohenstaufen as a "brood of vipers." Frederick would have certainly inherited from his father and his grandfather dreams of Italian domination and would certainly try to suffocate the Roman Church. The struggle was inevitable. A born fighter, Ugolino in no way shrank from it, and the anti-imperial party had found in him its leader at the court of Honorius. But he intended to prepare for it with the greatest care. The

struggle would be won by the Church on one condition: that its prestige among the masses of the people remained intact. Heretics, communes, and Empire might fight as they would so long as they fought separately; but if they were united in a popular revolt against Rome, that would mean ruin, the abomination of desolation, the reign of Antichrist.

The work of Francis was providential in helping to preserve the popular devotion to the Roman Church. The secular clergy were not to be greatly relied on; or, to be more exact, they themselves were responsible for making difficulties for the Church, either by their way of life, which provoked murmurs and reprobation among the faithful, or because they were at that time too prone to a spirit of independence and alliance with the civil power, to the detriment of the obedience due to the curia. There were many, indeed too many, religious orders, and the Lateran Council had opportunely forbidden the creation of new ones. There was still some life of a kind in the ancient Benedictine tree and its somewhat withered branches: the new shoots, the Cistercians and the Premonstratensians, had, in their first exuberance, brought with them a new blossoming of the cloistral virtues, and had proved themselves likewise steady in their support of the curia; but they were almost out of touch with the masses of the people. Nor, indeed, was the newest and most promising order, the Dominicans, of much use in this respect. It was entirely given up to the struggle against the heretics, and to this end carried on a constant and varied propaganda, confronting heretical with Catholic apostles. It was a useful and necessary work, but

none the less preëminently negative and defensive. What was wanted was a positive propaganda which should encourage and intensify the sacramental piety of the people by leading them in crowds to the feet of the priests, and make them realize for themselves that the Church was still the guardian of the sacraments and the refuge of the apostolic virtues. The pious activity and apostolic poverty of the Franciscan Order were a triumphant reply to the widely spread scandal of clerical worldliness, the prevalent sarcasms on the wealth and pomp of the clergy, and the contemptuous comparisons of their lives with those of Christ and the Apostles. But it was necessary that the Order should be firmly fitted into the ecclesiastical establishment rather than go forward by its own vitality and follow its own inner momentum. The practice of the apostolic virtues must not be allowed to become paradoxical and exclusive, thus developing into a disintegrating criticism of the ecclesiastical organization; and the apostolic life and activity must be interwoven with the whole life of the Church and combine to defend her truths and her rights against all attacks. What was needed was a constitution, with a well-graduated hierarchy, and a rigid discipline applied to all its members, from the higher authorities and the head of the Order downwards; the provision of normal and sufficient means of existence with the resulting attachment to Catholic society; and the proper way to bring this about was through the direct protection and control of the Papacy. But all this could be done only with the agreement, or at least the consent, of Brother Francis; without that, though the Order

would certainly have to give way, its precious work would also be lost.

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At their very first meeting at Florence Ugolino offered his support to Brother Francis, who thought that this was the reply of Providence to his reflections; and he suddenly displayed to his new friend a docility most unusual in him, and gave up his expedition to France. Ugolino told him that this would have been prejudicial to the interests of the Order. Francis had powerful enemies at the court of Rome; he and the other Cardinals who were well-disposed would help him; but his presence was essential. The motives for the Cardinal's objection were probably more various and more complex; but it was unnecessary to say all that was in his mind. Francis knew very well that he had enemies at Rome; and he began to understand that he needed friends. So he made up his mind to accept Ugolino's advice. The latter, moreover, did not look favourably on the "oversea missions"; and he reproved Francis for having sent his Brethren so far away, to die of hunger and suffer all manner of tribulations. But on this point Francis stood firm, and answered in the tone of one inspired: "Do you believe, my lord, that God sent my Brothers to the province of Italy alone? I say to you, in truth, that he has chosen and sent them for the salvation of souls throughout the world; and not only to the countries of the faithful, but to the countries of the infidel also." When Francis appealed to his inspiration and his divine mission, there was nothing to be done

but to leave the subject or to say no more. The Cardinal said no more.

Francis returned to the Porziuncola and continued his relations with the Cardinal. They developed a mutual regard for each other, because each found in the other something that was lacking in himself. Ugolino kept his promise and defended the Brother in the curia against suspicion and hostility. He also invited him to stay in his house in Rome, and experienced a proof of his somewhat original and sometimes eccentric sanctity, which could be as dangerous as it was attractive. Francis did not refuse to enter gentlemen's houses or to sit at their tables, because their charity, too, was in his eyes a legacy of Christ, just like any other charity offered to the poor. But, in accepting it, he remained himself: he did not forget that it was his business to set a good example and teach the apostolic virtues to his rich and illustrious hosts also. He appeared one day at the Cardinal's table, where he was already sitting with his priests and many Roman nobles, and laid down in front of him in a heap the scraps of stale bread that he had just begged from door to door. Ugolino blushed and fell into an embarrassed silence. Francis, quite unperturbed, took the place assigned to him beside the master of the house; and when his meal was over, he distributed these scraps to the guests, who piously accepted them from the Saint's hands. Seeing that the pious joke was taken in good part, Ugolino heaved a sigh of relief; but later, when alone with Francis in his room, he did not fail to reprove him courteously. Francis answered that he too had honoured the company by

serving God, as his duty was, in his own view, and by setting a good example in showing that he preferred the humble gifts of the poor to the more splendid offerings of the great. And the Cardinal gave way, saying: "Do as you will, for God is with you."

While accepting, however, the Cardinal's hospitality and support, Francis trusted in God and in himself, and intended to plead his own cause in person before the Pope and the curia. Ugolino, knowing the position, was not without apprehension as to what might come of such an experiment, and thought it well to prepare a discourse for his friend, composed in accordance with all the rules of rhetoric. Among the audience summoned to hear the now famous Brother were not wanting some who, with their contemptuous recollections of his sermons to animals, promised themselves some amusement at his expense. When he was about to begin his speech, there happened what had befallen him on other occasions: the prepared speech went completely out of his head. He stood for a moment trying to collect his thoughts; then, opening the psalter he had in his hand, he read: "All day confusion covered my face." He began forthwith to discourse with great vehemence of the evil habits and bad examples of many dignitaries of the Church, saying that the Church was confounded by their conduct because the transgressions of the great were the most disgraceful. He poured forth a torrent of words like one inspired, and his tone was in very truth that of a prophet of God; moreover, Francis accompanied his words with a swaying movement of his whole body, like a man

drunk with wine. The smiles died upon the lips of his learned and powerful listeners, who were not used to an address so impetuous and so frankly admonitory; and, above all, Pope Honorius was not a little edified.

During his stay in Rome, in the winter and early spring of 1218, Francis made the acquaintance of Dominic, founder of the "Preachers," who was then in Rome. The Cardinal, who introduced them to each other in his own house, must have looked for something more from their meeting than merely spiritual edification. The influence of Dominic, an older man, and of greater practical sense, imbued with ecclesiastical discipline, entirely absorbed in his activities against the heretics in defence of the Church, would be very opportune.

After both the Saints had poured out their souls in pious discourse, the Cardinal made them a proposal of great importance: that the ranks of the episcopate should be open for the new Orders. A good selection of bishops from the Friars Minor and the "Preachers" would have the double advantage of fertilizing the Catholic episcopate by an infusion of pure and fresh blood, and making the two Orders still more closely attached to the Church. There was a contest of courtesy between the heads of the two Orders to let the other be the first to reply; and Francis won. The first to speak was Dominic, who must in any case have been able to read his colleague's thought very clearly from his face. Both answered in the negative: Dominic gently and submissively, Francis with greater finality and decision. The former said that his Brothers

ought to consider it an honour to belong to his Order, and, so far as he was concerned, he would not allow them to enter upon ecclesiastical careers. Francis pointed out that his Brethren were called *Minor* precisely because they were not to aspire to become *Major*. Their vocation was humility, and they would bear good fruit to the Church by their mere fidelity to her. They must take care lest their poverty might be transformed into pride. On these grounds he pronounced that his Brethren could not be allowed to aspire to the higher offices of the Church.

Dominic's answer might perhaps have left some opening for a reply; that of Francis, none. The Cardinal dropped his proposal. The two Saints left the palace together; Dominic asked Francis to give him the cord of his tunic as a souvenir, and, after some deprecating refusals on the part of Francis, obtained it. The moment of farewell arrived; and (as perhaps happens sometimes when the most important thing is said at the end of an interview, because neither could find the courage to say it earlier) Dominic said to Francis: "I should be very glad, Brother Francis, if we could combine your Order and mine, and our Brethren live according to the same Rule." The Cardinal would not have been averse from this idea of Dominic's, which would have had the advantage of disposing at one stroke of certain ecclesiastical difficulties in the Franciscan movement. Just about that time Dominic, in order to regularize his position with the Lateran Council, had decided to accept the Augustinian Rule for his Brethren, so returning to the fold of the regular and tradi-

tional Orders. For once in his life Francis was diplomatic. He made no reply, as though he looked upon his colleague's proposal simply as an affectionate compliment. And the other understood that there was no use in pursuing the matter.

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Two spiritual friendships upon which Francis entered with two ladies of the city must belong to the period of this stay in Rome. One of them, by name Prassede, was already of advanced age, and for forty years and more had been living, from motives of piety, in strict seclusion, seeing no one and never going out. Francis made her acquaintance, attracted perhaps by what he had heard of her (her way of life was much talked of in Rome and even elsewhere), and was so much drawn to her that he did for her what he had never done for any other woman – except, of course, Clare and her companions – he received her into his own obedience, bestowing on her, as a reward for her piety, the habit and the cord of the Friars Minor.

The other was a gentlewoman living in the world, Giacoma, or Giacomina, of the family of the Settesoli, married to a member of the Frangipani family, one of the noblest in Rome, and left a widow while still young. Francis became greatly attached to her; he called her his little Brother Giacoma, perhaps because of certain manly qualities of hers. Giacomina was to have a privilege denied to Clare: to close the eyes of Francis.

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THERE was not yet any special official relation between Ugolino and the Order of the Minorites, but it had in fact already accepted his protection, and there was a close friendship between Francis and himself. Francis had allowed the Cardinal to occupy himself more especially with various convents of Poor Ladies which had established themselves in a good many places in central Italy. He allowed Ugolino to impose on these the Benedictine Rule, with certain additional austerities. The Cardinal might well cherish hopes of being able to intervene in the affairs of the Order. On Francis' invitation he hastened to the Porziuncola at Pentecost in 1219, to the Chapter called the "Chapter of the Straw Mats," the largest that had been held until then, and indeed larger than any that followed, because from that date the personal attendance of all the Brethren began to be given up and the gathering was confined to the Ministers alone. The name might well have applied to all the Chapters, because the Brothers brought straw mats with them to repair the huts in which they lodged. But the one of 1219 came to be called so *par excellence*, because so many had never been seen before.

Francis arrived, on his return from one of his usual journeys, to preside at the Chapter; and he suddenly discovered a disagreeable innovation. The city of Assisi, observing the multitudes that now attended these Chapters, had had a large building constructed to accommodate the Brethren; if not all, at any rate a considerable part of them, the more distinguished and higher in rank. Their intentions were excellent. But Francis could not tolerate, at

the Porziuncola itself, the mother and exemplar of the whole Order, such adultery against his Lady Poverty. He leapt upon the roof, ordering some of the Brothers to follow him, and began to hurl the tiles to the ground, displaying a strength most unexpected in so lean and slight a Brother. Anger strengthened his muscles; and he had quite determined to strip the roof off the whole building had not those placed in charge of it by the Commune prevented him, pointing out that it was the property of the Commune of Assisi and not of the Brethren. Then Francis refrained from his horrified work of destruction.

If the Cardinal of Ostia had already arrived, he must have told himself, at this spectacle, that Francis was still his old self. Still he did not abandon his attempt to introduce some systematization into the Order. The Chapter might be an excellent opportunity, because the Brothers were all gathered together to discuss freely their common necessities, and modify and complete their Rule. The existence of diverse tendencies in the heart of the Order was naturally not unknown to Ugolino; and he thought he could make use of them to induce Francis to retire from his unbending attitude. A frontal attack, on the question of poverty, would be a tactical error; nor indeed had the Cardinal ever thought of raising a revolt against him by supporting the weaker and insubordinate vessels. On the other hand, the more educated members of the Order might be of service: "Paris," to use a later expression of Fra Jacopone, had already begun to invade "Assisi." A good many of these more educated Brethren came to see the Cardinal,

certain of finding in him a sympathetic listener, and to explain how reasonable it was that Francis should not govern the Order by himself, but should listen to the advice of the wiser Brethren. This was the practice in the older Orders, which were governed in accordance with the venerable precepts of Benedict, Augustine, and Bernard.

Ugolino referred the matter to Francis, and laid stress on a movement that seemed to be aimed at his ascendancy. Francis said nothing, but took him by the hand and led him into the middle of the assembly. There he spoke as follows, with great intensity of feeling: " God has Himself shown me this way of simplicity and humility, both for myself and for those who wish to believe and to follow me. Do not speak to me of the Rules of St. Benedict, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard, or any other: for me the only Rule is the form of life which God, in His mercy, has shown to me and bestowed on me. God made known to me that I was to behave with a madness that the world knew nothing of, and that such madness was to be all the learning that we were to have. May God confound your learning and your wisdom; may He send evil spirits to punish you, and you shall return to your own place, whether you will or no, and curses shall be upon you."

Francis had never spoken so earnestly about himself, or with such bitter condemnation of those who did not agree with him. This inspired confidence and prophetic condemnation shook the Cardinal and those with him. No one dared to utter a word.

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At the Chapter the question of missions was again discussed. Of those that had been sent across the seas two years before, the mission of Brother Egidio to Tunis had come to an end before it had begun. The Europeans in that town, established there for business, whose first interest was to maintain good relations with the Mussulman authorities and population, objected to these importunate missionaries and compelled them to reëmbark. There was good news, on the other hand, of the Eastern mission under Brother Elias; but this was in territory occupied by Christians. The question of sending missions over the mountains as well as overseas – to Spain, France, Germany, Hungary, and also to those parts of Italy that had not yet been evangelized – was also discussed. The intention was not merely to complete a circle of propaganda, but to strengthen the Brethren in all these countries; moreover, the provincial Ministers were also to be securely and definitely instituted in their offices. Francis raised no objection to these missions being provided with a papal brief to present to the ecclesiastical authorities. This attested that the Franciscans followed a way of life approved by the Church, preaching in the manner of the Apostles; and contained instructions that they should be received and treated as good Catholics. It was simply a letter of introduction, a recommendation carrying no privilege: and therefore Francis had perforce to accept it.

This time, however, he flatly refused to remain at home while so many of his Brethren were going forth among unknown peoples, to endure hardships, privations,

and even dangers. And he not only wanted to follow their example, but to exceed it; for he had but renounced his worldly aspirations for an ambition to be first in the ways of God. While the Brothers were going far afield, but still among Christians, he decided to visit the infidel Mussulmans, and set out for the East. This time Ugolino made no objection, either because he thought it would be useless, or because he thought it desirable that Francis should visit the country of the crusade, that supreme enterprise of the Holy See in both the spiritual and the temporal sphere, or because he was discouraged by Franciscan obstinacy.

To go among the Mussulmans and convert them was an old idea of Francis'. In 1214 or 1215 he had set out for Morocco; but when he reached Spain, he fell ill, and, taking this as indicating God's will, he had gone back to Italy. Even earlier, in 1212, he had attempted a mission to Syria. This time the divine objections had taken the form of a contrary wind that had driven the ship on the Dalmatian coast. Observing that the year was too far advanced for him to find ships going to Syria, and not wishing to lose time, Francis had decided to return to Ancona; and the captain to whom he applied not having been willing to accept him as a passenger for nothing, he had climbed down into the interior of the ship and hidden himself in the hold. Later on, the sailors were very glad of their unwanted guest, because the provisions which Francis had been given by a pious disciple he had made during his sojourn in Dalmatia had been a considerable help to them all during the long and stormy crossing.

This time Francis set out in the company of Pietro Cattani. Pietro and Elias were, shortly after, successively at the head of the Order, as Vicars of Francis; but it is difficult to imagine a more complete contrast of character. Pietro had a deep admiration and a limitless devotion for Francis: for him every word and every gesture of the Father was gospel. Father Elias loved Francis not less than Pietro, but he would not surrender the use of his intelligence, which was no mean one. Of humble origin, he had first practised the trade of mattress-maker in Assisi, his native city; then, at Assisi also, he had risen to the position of schoolmaster. Thence he spread his wings for the University of Bologna, where he had become a lawyer, and acquired the reputation of a learned man. A liking for Francis personally and the promising development of the Order must have attracted him originally. He had a profound desire to express himself in action, great self-confidence, and an iron will. He was not vulgarly ambitious: he wanted to employ his abilities to the advancement of Francis and the Order. But "advancement" did not mean for him what it meant for the Father. The Friars Minor were to become a power of the first rank in the Church and in Christian society.

The Eastern enterprise must have been a very attractive prospect to Francis, and perhaps he was drawn thither for that reason. It was a country well adapted for the establishment of the Order as he understood it. In Palestine and in Egypt near by, where the force of the Christian crusade had begun to be felt, politics and religion were merged into

one. It was a holy war. The aim of defence and conquest was to redeem the land of Christ from the infidels. There wealth and power could not be dispensed with; they were employed to the glory of God. His preaching brought him a noteworthy personal success: the subdeacon Cesario of Spire, a learned man who, while still in the world, had preached and practised the apostolic life and made conversions, came to him, and became the first German recruit to the Order.

Francis left with his mind full of somewhat conflicting ideas. Even while on his way to the East he intended to remain the apostolic missionary. He wanted to convert the Mussulmans to God's word, not to subdue and destroy them by human weapons. He looked for better results from his preaching than from the crusading army. He joined it, however, before Damietta, and immediately found a great deal to disappoint him. In this assemblage of penitent pilgrims (such were the crusaders, in theory) habits not dissimilar to those of ordinary armies were prevalent, indeed even worse ones. In all crusading armies the merely adventurous elements were bound to be numerous: those who found themselves in awkward and difficult situations, unemployed persons, debtors, and outlaws were the first to gather under the privileged standard. All the more so on this occasion, when the preparation of the crusade had lacked any serious financial and military organization. There was no discipline whatever in the camp. The Generalissimo was the papal legate, Pelagio, Cardinal of Albani, because, by an innovation of Innocent III, the Papacy, besides preaching

the crusade and directing the religious side of it, had also undertaken the duty of its technical organization. But the capacity for this was wanting, and the attempt had not been successful. The ecclesiastical control of the enterprise had had the result of preventing anyone's being effectively at the head of it. The lay commanders, soldiers by profession, would not bow to priestly orders; and Pelagio was not the man to impose obedience by his personal prestige.

Brother Francis, in his simple goodness, saw things must fall out badly. An armed struggle in these conditions, on the enemy's territory, was not a little dangerous, and this time common sense agreed with the apostolic point of view. Francis encouraged himself by reflecting that nothing good could come of force, not even the liberation of the Holy Land. He would have liked to speak; but he hesitated, for he saw that he would not be taken seriously. The personal successes of Brother Elias could not have made his way easy for him; perhaps they had unintentionally made it more difficult. Anyone who was in sympathy with the latter's determined, hard, and worldly purposes must have been disconcerted by Francis' apostolic renunciation. He asked Brother Pietro's advice as to how he should behave; and the latter advised him to listen to the voice of his conscience and speak freely. He might be taken for a madman; but that would be nothing novel for him, and he must fear God more than men. Francis spoke, and tried to dissuade the crusaders from giving battle. No one listened to him; they advanced to the attack, and the battle ended in a

great Christian defeat. The madman had seen more clearly than the sane.

Since he could do nothing with the Christians, Francis made haste to approach the Mussulmans; this was, in fact, his object in crossing the sea, and their conversion would have rendered the armed crusade useless. He left the Christian camp, where they tried in vain to detain him, concluding that he was madder than ever. Once outside the Christian lines, he soon fell in with the soldiers of Malek-al-Kamil, and was greeted with abuse and showers of blows. Not knowing a word of the language, he confined himself to shouting: "*Soldan, soldan,*" so that they should conduct him to the Sultan. Malek-al-Kamil, more humane than his followers, allowed him to preach in his presence and to his army, of course through an interpreter. Francis spoke of Christ and the Gospel, both being highly regarded by the Saracens. He had too much good sense to pass from praises of Christ to abuse of Mohammed; moreover, it was not his way to abuse anyone.

He stayed among them for several days, and they listened to him gladly, especially the Sultan; but he could not arouse any deeper feeling than this benevolent curiosity. Then he himself expressed his intention of going back, and the Sultan had him honourably escorted to the Christian camp. This treatment at the hands of the King of Egypt reinstated Francis in the eyes of the crusaders; and it was whispered among them with awe that the Sultan, in dismissing Brother Francis, had asked for his prayers, because he had been inspired to choose the religion dearest to

God. On both sides in this more than secular struggle, kept in equilibrium by an infinite succession of defeats and victories, the solid rock of faith would be slightly split by an isolated doubt or two. Men would tell the story of the three rings, possessed by the three sons of one father, who alone knew which of them was genuine.

When he returned to the camp, Francis made a few recruits, and was present at the fall of Damietta, in November, 1219. There was a terrible slaughter and much plundering: the Papal legate had to write that even the Christians thought they had killed too many; but he consoled himself with the fabulously rich booty. These were hardly scenes for Franciscan eyes; and it was worse when the conquering army, in its Capuan ease, indulged in every vice, and threw off all restraint. It was too much for Francis; he silently shook the dust off his sandals, and passed from Egypt into Syria. He stayed there a short time, no doubt to visit the sacred places; a late, but not untrustworthy record relates that the Sultan of Egypt allowed him and his Brethren free access, without the customary tribute, to the Holy Sepulchre. And never were more fervent or worthier prayers offered in that place; never did Christian knees bend with truer reverence and deeper emotion in the earth consecrated by the blood of Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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THE REFORM OF THE ORDER

FRANCIS STAYED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN SYRIA: THE summer found him still there. For the head of a new Order, in full growth and, moreover, in the full crisis of its growth, the leave of absence he allowed himself seems extraordinarily long. But the attraction of the Holy Land must have been irresistible; and the alternations of solitude, which his soul loved, with the life of a missionary and master of men had always been a necessity to Francis. This necessity grew on him as the years went on, and as his dealings with men caused him more fatigue.

His recall to his daily duties was sudden and abrupt. One day one of the Brothers arrived bringing grave news. The two Vicars that Francis had left to govern the Order in his absence had held the Chapter of Pentecost; and the spirit of innovation, or rather of reaction, which the clear, stern words of Francis had put to confusion the previous year, had triumphed in his absence. The Vicars and the Chapter (which had not been a general assembly of the Order, but a conference of those who held the views of the majority) had remodelled the Rule, approximating it to those of Benedict, Augustine, and Bernard, the older Orders, famous and of proved worth, whose semblance they must assume if they wished to succeed and count for some-

thing in Christian society. Monastic asceticism had been emphasized, by increasing the number of abstinences and fasts. But these innovations had not pleased everybody: even in his absence Francis still kept his faithful adherents. There were sinister rumours of his death: some said he had been murdered, others that he had been drowned, or had died of some malady. But those who truly wished him well did not believe in his death. A young lay Brother volunteered to go and look for him in the far-away and perilous East, and at last succeeded in finding him.

The messenger found him at table, with the faithful Pietro. The meal before them included meat, which was forbidden under the new Rule. Francis asked with a bitter smile what he was to do. Pietro answered with calm loyalty (he deserved his name) that it was for Francis to decide, since he alone could give orders. And Francis once more appealed to Gospel authority for eating what was set before him.

But the objectionable innovations were not only new regulations introduced by laymen under cover of the habit of the Order. There were others, even more serious, about which the Brother gave rather less exact information. Brother Philip, the Visitor, or Inspector, of the Poor Ladies, had obtained letters of protection for them from Rome, amounting to a major excommunication of anyone who should molest them. This was an outrage in the eyes of Francis, a mortal enemy of privilege, and steadfast in the principle of non-resistance to evil. Brother John of Campello had actually founded a new Order: aping

Francis, he had composed it of lepers of both sexes. And he had applied to Rome for approval.

More precise intelligence would have brought Francis back to Italy at once; but even in the Brother's outline of what had happened, there was enough to make him decide to return. In the company of Pietro, Elias, Cesario, and a few others, he hastened to embark, probably at St. John of Acre; and as he left behind those walls already battered by the surges of the Mussulman reconquest, the last fragment left of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which had been founded so hopefully more than a century ago, gloomy images of its early and inglorious decay must have troubled his mind. He disembarked at Venice, and on his way to central Italy he stopped at Bologna, knowing that he would find there, at that moment, Cardinal Ugolino, legate of the Holy See in Lombardy. While there, he had, or so it seemed, a proof that times had changed. People were talking of a new "house of Friars Minor." So these degenerate children were in possession of a house which belonged to them: a true convent instead of the modest huts of wood and mud, erected on land that was not theirs, but charitably lent them for their use. Francis turned back and sent to tell them that they must all leave the house immediately. The Brothers became aware that Francis was not dead and made haste to obey; only a few sick persons were allowed to remain.

Cardinal Ugolino made haste to put matters straight by the exercise of his legal diplomacy, saying that the house was his and that the Brethren had only the use of it.

Francis accepted the Cardinal's contention and allowed them to return. It was the first instance of an expedient that was soon to be constantly employed. But this was not the only matter, nor the most important one, that they had to discuss; and their first interview could not have been pleasant for either of them. Francis had departed for the Holy Land relying on the Cardinal's vigilance and care, during his absence, for the well-being of his whole Order. And now he found that all was unside-down; and this although one of the Vicars he had left behind was a nephew of Ugolino. His respect for a cardinal was too profound to allow him to make any actual and definite accusation, and his affection for Ugolino was too great to give way before a strain; but he was deeply hurt.

The Cardinal, of course, had an excellent defence. What, in fact, had been his position, until then, in regard to Francis and his Order? Nothing more than that of a private and personal friend, without any official status, and therefore without adequate authority. Three years before, he had offered himself to Francis as the protector of the Order in its relations with the Holy See; but this offer had been, in substance, refused. Francis had shown him friendship and respect, had stayed in his house, appeared in his company at the papal court, and had invited him to the Chapter at the Porziuncola; always preserving intact his own freedom and independence. Francis, until then, would not hear of any official and regular intervention by the papal authority in his favour, and had hardly been willing to accept a simple statement of recognition for the Brothers,

together with the brief of the year before. Was it surprising, then, that the Pope, in his turn, preserved his freedom of action and took decisions which Francis did not like? He must make up his mind: if he wanted help and protection for his work from the Pope and from the Church against external attacks and internal schisms, he must ask for and accept official intervention and direction. And if Francis decided to accept from him, Ugolino, the protection offered at Florence, he must himself request the Pope to appoint him definitely as protector of the Order, and they must then come to a regular understanding.

The iron logic of the man of authority, softened as it was by feelings of affection and respect, made Francis hesitate. And yet he would probably have resisted still further if the difficulties of the Order had arisen entirely from the misdeeds and shortcomings of the Brethren. But the external troubles were more serious than ever. Together with the disturbances in the government of the Order, Francis found bad news of the missions across the mountains that had been sent out the year before. The French mission had come up against the hostile mistrust that was then prevalent there in regard to wandering preachers, a result of the struggle against the Albigensians that had just come to an end. Priests unprovided with a certificate of recognition were nowhere allowed to celebrate Mass, and unknown strangers were refused Communion and Christian burial. It was well remembered that the Lateran Council had forbidden the foundation of new orders. The Brothers (at the head of whom was Pacifico, an ex-poet who had had his

hour of fame, under the name of "King of Verse," and had been converted by Francis personally some years before) did not know French and could not explain themselves: they could only say yes, in the language of the country. And they answered yes, even when anyone asked them (for they could not understand) if they were Albigensians. The copy of the Rule that they brought with them (the Catholic spirit of which was indisputable, since it began with a profession of obedience to the Pope) and the papal brief of introduction saved them from the stake; but this was not enough for them to be allowed to stay in French dioceses and preach there. The Holy See had to intervene once more with the bishops and remind them of the brief, and firmly enjoin them not to refuse the Friars Minor permission to stay in their districts and preach.

Matters were even worse in Germany. The mission was very numerous, which was not likely to make the difficulties any less; at the head of it was Giovanni of Parma, a true Franciscan, the future General of the Order. Their ignorance of the language was even more complete; and, moreover, there was very likely a certain racial antipathy to the Italians. There, too, the Brothers got along by their use of "*Ja*"; and there, too, they used it to reply to those who asked them if they were heretics. Lombardy, whence they came, and which in German eyes was easily identified with the whole of Italy, was particularly suspect as being the home of the Cathari and Waldensians. The Germans went further than the French in their hostile demonstrations, and the Brothers were thrown into prison or put half

naked in the pillory. They met with a similar welcome, or worse, in Hungary; the peasants hurled insults at them, set their dogs on them, and prodded them with the points of their sticks. To ingratiate themselves with their persecutors, they decided to present them with their cloaks; but the only result of that was that the ruffians robbed them of their tunics and breeches as well. The poor Brothers came back from those parts saying that they had been in the land of the infidel, where there was nothing more they could suffer but martyrdom.

Five Brethren of the expedition to Morocco three years before did indeed achieve martyrdom; or, it would be truer to say, they sought it and won it. From Christian Spain they had passed into Mussulman country, where they had begun to abuse Mohammed. On being brought before the Sultan at Seville, they repeated their insults, and were put into prison. Then the King gave them the choice of returning to a Christian country or going to Morocco. They naturally chose Morocco; and there, at the hands of the "Miramolino," as the Caliph of Morocco was called, they at last found what they sought. The Caliph in question himself cut their heads off, one after another.

The fate of these last Brothers was not a matter that discouraged Francis. But what happened in France, Germany, and Hungary was very different: there it was the Catholic populace and the Catholic authorities themselves who had maltreated and rejected the defenceless Brothers. Francis

took his decision and at once hurried to the Roman court, which was at that moment at Orvieto, awaiting the fatigues and anxieties of the imperial coronation, which was to follow in November. Francis, who had always been ill at ease in an antechamber, waited one day for Pope Honorius at the exit from the papal palace; and, in his laconic and incisive style, said to him that, having hitherto had dealings with many popes, he now prayed to be assigned one only, with whom he could come to an understanding so far as might be necessary for the Order. The "many popes" were, of course, the heads of the various sections of the curia, with whom Francis had found he had to negotiate. It was certainly simpler and more effective to deal with one only; but he would inevitably become possessed of greater power.

On being asked by the Pope if he had anyone to suggest, Francis replied that he wanted the Cardinal of Ostia, and the Pope, who must have known this already, at once granted his request. Thus Ugolino became the official protector of the Order. And he was a true "pope": full of enthusiasm, but also of authority. It was agreed that the innovations introduced into the Order, in the absence of its head and without unanimity, should be regarded as of no effect. The privilege obtained by Brother Philip for the Sisters of Clare was revoked. Brother John, with his Order of lepers, was removed and disgraced. Ugolino could certainly not have negotiated with either of them, or even with the Vicars, without damaging his position. He contented himself, during the absence of Francis, with letting matters

alone (all the more so as there was no official obligation to intervene), thinking that these things would help to make Francis realize the necessity of putting the Order on a regular footing in good earnest, and coming to a general understanding with Rome.

The annulment of the innovations was one side of the account, and the one most to Francis' taste; but Ugolino was uncompromising in his insistence on the other. The discipline of the Order left a good deal to be desired; how much it had declined during Francis' absence the latter could see for himself. No progress could be made by freedom of inspiration alone: as the community increased and multiplied, it called for precise rules and a rigorous control. Before everything else it was essential to regularize the admissions to the Order, the tenure of membership, and where and how the Brothers should live. Hitherto anyone who appeared at the Porziuncola and was accepted by Francis became without further formality a member of the Order; but if, later on, one of them wanted to leave it, there was no means of detaining him, and Francis does not seem to have tried to do so. Once he had assumed the habit, the Friar Minor, provided he observed the few precepts of the Rule, was free to come and go as he might feel inspired to do; provinces and Ministers were already in existence, but there were, properly speaking, no convents nor obligations of residence. Continual and restless wandering was a primary characteristic of the Franciscan community. A bull of Honorius, from Orvieto, under date of September 22, 1220, put an end to this state of affairs. By this a novitiate

of one year before the profession of Friar Minor was made obligatory; and after profession it was not permitted to leave the Order. The Friars Minor were also forbidden to go about without belonging to a definite community, and without the permission of their superiors; indeed, the latter were given authority to excommunicate such rovers.

This was a decisive step in the transformation of the Minorites from a free community into a regular Order in accordance with canon law. It was then essential to draw up definitely the Rule, which since 1210 had remained in a fluid state; and to provide the Order with a consistent and vigorous authority to apply the Rule and all the ecclesiastical ordinances, in accordance with Roman and Catholic discipline. The solution, which had for some time found favour, of making the Friars Minor adopt one of the existing Rules, the most serious attempt in this direction being the pronouncement of the so-called " learned " Brothers at the Chapter of 1219, now had to be given up. Careful and courteous as he was, Ugolino knew how to balance the concession necessary on his part by another, or rather two others, that he obtained from Francis. The latter was to draw up the final Rule, with the assistance of certain of the Brothers; the Cardinal was to revise and approve their work. The second point was that Francis should hand over to others the practical daily control of the Order. It was essential—and the Cardinal would know how to emphasize this point—to have one individual established permanently in the office of General, and giving his whole attention to his executive duties. Francis' work lay in the missionary

sphere, which he ought not and did not want to give up. He would continue to be the head of the Order, and its legislator; but he would have a Vicar for the regular dispatch of daily business.

In the few weeks that had passed since his return Francis had had leisure to remark how quickly the Order was becoming transformed – indeed, the very word was significant. The appearance of new tendencies, represented by the multitude of recruits of the last years, was irresistible: or, at least, Francis no longer hoped to be able to resist them merely by his words and his example. He now realized that such spiritual methods sufficed for a few individuals, a few privileged souls, alone, such as he had met with in the early days of his mission. On the majority his words and example produced a momentary effect, which rapidly disappeared. The opposing tendencies and habits were not dislodged, and at last won the day by the mere force of passive resistance. If they were to be eradicated, there would be nothing for it but to give up the spiritual methods of persuasion for those of compulsion from without. It would be necessary to follow a systematic course of penalties, suspensions, and expulsions. The close contact now established with the Roman curia, the reorganization which had been introduced into the Order under the direction of the Cardinal, its protector, would provide the means for this new policy. It remained to be seen whether curia and Cardinal would always look on matters in the same way as Francis. But this was not the only difficulty, nor was it for him the decisive one.

The Saint was unwilling to abandon the spiritual methods of persuasion in favour of those of compulsion from without. He did not wish to become, as he said later to his more intimate disciples, " the executioner of his own sons." His physical condition had been deteriorating for some time and his capacity for work and endurance was diminished. Of a naturally delicate constitution, Francis had worn himself out by privations, austerities, and the hardships of his perpetual missionary journeys, which had lasted now for twelve years. Serious affections of the stomach and the liver had troubled him for some time and he had suffered in the East from a sharp attack of conjunctivitis. If it had not been for the other, the real, motives, his infirmities would not have been enough to make him give up. But with the others they constituted a further motive which could be published abroad in the interest both of truth and of convenience, thus avoiding any scandal in the Order.

The Saint, therefore, not only accepted the Cardinal's proposal, but showed himself disposed to go further. It was not, for him, a question of a partial and temporary transfer of authority into the hands of a Vicar, but a final and absolute withdrawal in favour of a new head of the Order, whom he would obey as faithfully as the humblest Brother. Francis knew no middle ways; he could not be content with anything less than complete authority, or none; it was a surrender of the government of the Order and he would set thereby to everyone an example of absolute renunciation and heroic humility.

A Chapter at the Porziuncola was announced for Saint Michael's day. In the presence of the assembled Brothers, Francis took Brother Pietro by the hand, led him to the midst of the gathering, and said: "My health will not let me take care of you, as I should. Here, from henceforward, is your master and mine, whom we are all to obey. I am dead to you." Then, in the presence of the deeply moved assemblage, he raised his clasped hands and his eyes to heaven, and commended to God the family with whose government he had been entrusted by Him until that time. This task would now fall to the Ministers; and they would have to render account to God if any Brother were lost by their negligence or evil example, or even by over-harsh correction. And in order that he might be the humblest of all in his submission, he requested them to assign him a Brother who should stand to him in the capacity and with the authority of a guardian.

Brother Pietro was devoted to the Father; and no one was less likely to take the Saint's renunciation literally. From the very first day he had recourse to his advice; and in his relations with him Francis found he had given up the burdens of his position rather than his effective authority. But Pietro did not continue long in his post: on March 10, 1221 he died at the Porziuncola (the memorial stone may still be seen in one of the outer walls of the chapel). The Cardinal-protector had to be consulted in the choice of his successor, who was Brother Elias. Francis had already shown confidence in him, by entrusting him with an important mission like the one to the East, and had

chosen him as his companion in Italy. Since it was now realized that there was needed at the head of the Order a man of energy and authority who understood the employment of the ordinary human methods of government, no one seemed better adapted to the post than Brother Elias: in him the views of Francis and Cardinal Ugolino would be happily combined.

If Pietro had been rather more Vicar than Minister, Elias was naturally more Minister than Vicar, though he never failed in respect and affection for Francis. Nor did the latter attempt to interfere with him in the exercise of his authority. Francis, of set purpose, now confined himself to guiding the Brethren by his silent example alone. It was still his duty, before God, to continue in that example, complete and undiminished, while his strength allowed of it; and he thought that it should weigh with the Brethren as much as his spoken command, as a kind of second Rule. And if sometimes he was grieved to observe the Brethren not walking in the way of the apostolic life, he told himself that, having given them an example, he had fully done his duty and was thenceforward free from all responsibility.

There were still, of course, many Brothers who came to ask his advice. He remained at all times the living oracle of the Order. Francis tried to put them off, but he often gave way and talked to them, and his spirit of inspired authority moved him to severe comments and demonstrations that were sometimes almost violent. On one occasion a novice, who had obtained permission of the General to compile a

collection of Lives of the Saints, came to him also to ask his approval. It was precisely a subject on which Francis had strong views; he answered, speaking of Charlemagne and his paladins, that they had done mighty deeds against the infidel, and had died in battle, martyrs for Christ's sake; then came the poets, who made stories out of their great deeds, and got money for reciting them in streets and courtyards. "The same thing," said Francis, "is happening among us. The saints have accomplished great deeds, and certain Brothers want to acquire fame by relating them." And thus he thought to dismiss the matter. But a few days later the Brother returned to the charge; to whom Francis, this time rather sharply, said: "When you have got your book of legends, you will want a breviary. And then you will climb up into a chair like a bishop and say to your Brother: 'Fetch me my breviary.'" He broke off, and as they happened to be standing near the hearth, he picked up a handful of ashes and put them on his head, making as though to pour them over himself. "This is your breviary," he cried. The Brother was abashed and said nothing. Then Francis, growing calmer, explained that he also had been tempted to possess books, but had read in the Gospel: "It is given you to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; for others there are parables." "There are so many," he said in conclusion, "who resort to the parables of knowledge that blessed is he who for the love of God is ignorant, and without wit."

A few months later Francis and the Brother met once more; and the latter obstinately returned to the subject.

Francis thought he had already said too much; and he contented himself with saying: "Do what your Minister tells you." Then, struck with remorse lest he should have, in a manner, betrayed the Spirit, he added: "He who would be a Minorite must, by the Rule, possess only his habit, girdle, and breeches, and sandals if he really needs them."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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THE RULES

FRANCIS' USUAL REPLY TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE Brethren was to refer them purely and simply to the Rule, which was the result of a long succession of consultations. The Rule (combined with the living Rule, the daily example) must be considered as his work and his legacy; and for that reason, when he had given up the exercise of authority, he was all the more anxiously intent upon its final redaction. Cesario of Spire, with his biblical knowledge, helped him to introduce a quantity of quotations from the New Testament, and some from the Old Testament, especially from the Psalms. For some of them, indeed, and those the most important, he had no need of Cesario's help: these were the texts of the Gospel on which his life had always been founded. To give everything to the poor, and leave everything to follow the Lord; to go about the world possessing nothing; to care nothing for material necessities and to have no money; not to resist ill-treatment: all these pillars of early Franciscanism are to be found in the Rule of 1221; and at the head of it the solemn profession, full of a holy pride: "This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," which was enough (as he went on to explain) to bind the Brethren to obey those Gospel precepts which were not expressly mentioned in the Rule. And

as this way of life had been so revealed to Francis by God Himself, to follow him and enter upon it could only come by "divine inspiration." Whosoever offered himself (all the Ministers could now admit candidates to the Order) must distribute his possessions among the poor, if that were possible; the Brothers might receive only matters of immediate necessity, like other poor persons, always exclusive of money. He was then to receive two habits, a girdle, and a pair of breeches; when the novitiate (an innovation introduced by Honorius) was over, he was to take the vows, and might then have but one garment. After that, the Brother, "in accordance with the command of our lord the Pope," might not leave the Order, or go about at will, because "no man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back shall profit the kingdom of heaven." The precepts for prayer remain as simple and moderate as before, and the fasts are reduced, quite contrary to the wishes of the Vicars. Mention is made of "Ministers and Servants," established in the various provinces and at particular places, without as yet any distinction between the provincial Ministers and other and lower grades, such as Custodians and Guardians. Emphasis is laid on the fact that such offices are not to be regarded as involving authority, like that of the princes of this world, but service: the appellation of Prior is forbidden. The discipline is essentially spiritual, founded on fraternal and mutual admonition, as has already been described. No specific penalty is laid down for transgressions by the Brethren: they shall be dealt with "as may seem

good in the eyes of God." In addition to the general Chapter of Pentecost, provision is made for a provincial Chapter on Saint Michael's day.

The Brothers are still enjoined to work at whatever trade had been theirs; and among the trades is included domestic service, so that fixed and obligatory residence in convents (Francis speaks only of "places") is not provided for. In case of necessity they are to have recourse to alms, just like "other poor people." They are to have no dwelling-place of their own, and make no resistance to anyone who may wish to turn the Brethren out of their abodes, and they are to possess no money. On the other hand, they may own the implements of their own trade. Their possessions, in other words, are their own labour, and the implements and fruits of that labour, not capital and the accumulation of capital.

Preaching is everywhere considered as a natural activity of the Brothers – the ordinary discourses of every day, no less than the missions, properly so called, of long duration and in different countries, even as far as the Saracens and the infidels. No one is to preach "against the form and establishment of the Church," and without permission from the Minister, and no one is to consider the office of preacher as his privilege, but be always ready to lay it down. All are to preach by the example of their own works. They are to be on their guard against pride and vainglory and the ambition to make a good figure in the eyes of men. All are to live as, and call themselves Catholics; any who fail in this and do not mend their

ways are to be ejected from the Order. They are to confess to the priests of the Order, and, failing that, to secular priests, with firm faith in the sacramental virtue bestowed on them and them alone. And after confession they are to communicate, because in the Eucharist is eternal life.

They are always to do their best to serve, love, honour, and worship God with pure hearts and minds and to take refuge with Him as with a shepherd of souls. And at this point Francis writes down the prayer of Jesus, in the Gospel of Saint John (chapter xvii) to the Father on behalf of His disciples, and applies it to the Friars Minor; one feels that he is repeating on his own behalf to Jesus the words that Jesus said to the Father: "I pray to Thee for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine. . . . Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me. . . . I gave to them Thy word and the world hath hated them. . . . As Thou hast sent me into the world even so have I also sent them into the world. . . . Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. . . . That the world may know that Thou has sent me and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me."

The Rule of 1221, in its want of orderly arrangement, in its unrestrained and passionate language, in the ejaculations and prayers with which it ends, is a document of early Franciscanism. It is instinct throughout with the spirit of the Saint, and the work and assistance of Cesario certainly did not extend beyond the addition of some

passages from both Testaments and a formal revision of the document. The two real innovations were the papal decision regarding the novitiate, and the restriction of the Ministers' obligations as regards Chapters to an attendance at the Chapter of Pentecost, with the proviso that it should be enough for the Ministers outside Italy to put in an appearance every three years; thus the general Chapter was no longer annual, but triennial (and this was in conformity with a decision of the Lateran Council). These decisions were rendered inevitable by the enormous increase in the number of the Brothers; it was not practicable to set in motion every year thousands of persons from all over Europe and even beyond, leaving empty what were really and truly convents, whether Francis called them so or not. But it is true that the presence of all the Brethren, without distinction of rank, conferred a popular character on the early assemblies of the Porziuncola, which was lost when only the Ministers and the Custodians, who were at the head of the subdivisions of every province, were present. And the influence of Francis likewise diminished when it could no longer make itself felt in an enthusiastic crowd of Brothers, but had to face a limited number of persons in authority, inspired by official prudence alone. The change was so sudden that no one thought of removing the contradiction involved in the permission given to every Brother of bringing an accusation against his superior in the Chapter of Pentecost.

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THE first draft of the "Third Order" belongs to this same year, 1221. Francis, in his surviving writings, never mentions the Third Order, and the oldest records and recollections concerning him contain only a few references to it. The Saint was probably not responsible for its establishment. He had gathered round himself a number of persons who were desirous of practising the apostolic life and preaching the virtues of the Gospels among men. Their preaching was addressed frankly to the whole world, and the world was expected to listen. In addition, however, to this apostolic nucleus there was a further confraternity enrolled for similar purposes, scarcely intended for the clergy with their sacramental privileges, but for the main body of the faithful. From these Francis did not ask any abandonment of their ordinary life; he desired them to continue in their ordinary occupations while practising the Christian virtues. As a matter of fact, most of them did not transform their way of life as much as the Saint would have liked; while the minority, who were truly moved by his words, found the program laid down by the Saint too modest for their ardour. Yet although they had not abandoned the world, they wished in some way to distinguish themselves from the rest of the faithful. It was a repetition of much that had already happened in other religious movements, especially in that of the Umiliati. Religious communities of laymen were very numerous, and a confraternity of the kind was bound to grow up within the Franciscan movement. The old profound and all-embracing influence on society as a whole had to give place to a congeries of

determinate nuclei, with a certain character of lay monasticism.

The Rule of 1221, which has survived only in a revised version of some years later, must have been the result of a collaboration between Francis and Cardinal Ugolino, but more especially influenced by the latter. The Cardinal's interest in the Third Order was certainly greater than that of the Saint: as a practical man, Ugolino understood the importance of these religious nuclei planted in the very centre of civil society, where they were properly established and controlled, apart from their effectiveness against the heretical organizations. The text of the Rule which has reached us bears the imprint of a clear intellect, legally inclined and meticulously precise.

The men and women of the confraternity are to wear simple garments, costing little; but dispensations are allowed for varying circumstances and social conditions. Two meals a day only (three for manual workers, from Easter to Saint Michael's day), temperance in food and drink, and abstinence from meat on four days in the week (more stringent than the Rule for the Minorites). Fasts, besides Advent and Lent, on Fridays from Easter to All Saints', and on Wednesdays also for the rest of the year. But anyone working in another's house was to eat what was put before him, with due regard for the ordinances of the Church. The devotions laid down are identical, except for certain additions, with those of the Minorites. At Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, Confession and Communion. Abstention from entertainments and dances. All are to be present

once a month at a reunion in a church, to follow divine service and listen to a sermon by a religious.

These are the religious and ascetic ordinances, without any special characteristics. Certain other provisions of a social character are to be looked for in any such confraternity: a collection for the poorer Brothers at the monthly meeting, material and spiritual assistance to sick Brethren, offices and prayers for those who have died. More noteworthy is the obligation to make a will, so as not to be cut off intestate, a provision obviously introduced for the avoidance of lawsuits; and also the obligation to make good ill-gotten gains, on entering the Order. Other provisions stand out in greater relief: the prohibition against carrying arms; the abstention from the use of oaths, not only in conversation and in private, but also in the public courts; the injunction on the Ministers of the Order to take peaceful measures to compose differences between Brothers, thus avoiding any reference to the courts. These precepts, had they been put into practice in their entirety, would have led the "Brothers and Sisters of Penitence" (such was their original name, it was only later that they were called the Third Order) to establish, within ordinary lay society, too many religious organizations, entirely self-contained. But the provisions are not precise, or were accompanied by extensive exceptions. We find echoes of the prohibition against bearing arms, which was sufficient in itself, if carried out on a large scale, to have revolutionized social life, in certain disputes between the penitents and the civil authorities, and in the intervention of the ecclesiastical

authorities in favour of the former; but, as a whole, the social results were negligible. The nature of this provision was such that only by putting into practice all the other clauses akin to it, such as those regarding oaths and lawsuits, could it be observed and produce its full effect – and with entirely revolutionary results.

The Society of the Brothers of Penitence was closely united to the order of the Minorites. The local heads of it were Brothers of the Order, and Brothers came to visit and inspect the confraternities and take the necessary measures for their government. When there were difficulties with the civil authorities, involving " their rights and privileges," their Minorite Ministers had to assist them, subject to the advice of the bishops. This vindication of " rights and privileges " is enough to show that it is not Francis alone who drew up the constitution of the Third order, or, indeed, had a decisive part in it. The prohibitions regarding arms, oaths, and lawsuits, with their pure savour of primitive Christianity, reproduce the spirit in perfection; but he would not have understood them as rights, and he would never have thought to defend them as privileges. He would have thought it natural to endure the consequences, without opposition, on the apostolic principle of " non-resistance to evil."

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The compilation of the Rule, brought to a conclusion by Francis in 1221, did not meet the wishes of the Cardinal-protector and the reforming party. No account was taken

of the felt need for a stronger and more definite, and at the same time more elastic, organization of the Order. And the necessity for a substantial attenuation of the rigid Franciscan idealism was ignored. The work of Francis had inevitably to face opposition from two quarters: external, from the Cardinal, as representing the curia, and internal, from Brother Elias and the majority of the Ministers. As to the forms which this opposition took we know nothing; but it is certain that this Rule was never promulgated with the Pontiff's approval nor, it would seem, even submitted for formal and general approval by the assembly of the Order. Those who were present at the Chapter of Pentecost in 1221 and described what took place say nothing of it.

Brother Elias presided at this Chapter: Saint Francis lay stretched at his feet, and whenever he wanted to make a suggestion, pulled at his habit, and the Vicar bent down to listen. The Father took no direct part in the proceedings except to preach at the opening of the Chapter on the words: "Blessed be the Lord God, who has taught my fingers to fight." It was once more a very crowded Chapter, because the restrictions of attendance to the Ministers had not yet come into force. Yet there was no lack of necessaries; indeed, so many were the contributions from Assisi and the surrounding country-side that they finally had to be sent back. Cardinal Ugolino, sent into Lombardy by the Pope, was replaced by his colleague Raniero Capocci. One subject for discussion was the subdivision of the provinces under the control of "Custodians," whom we find introduced into the Rule of 1223, and perhaps other measures

for the government of the community, and elections to office. One important matter must certainly have been discussed – the new mission to Germany, after the disastrous issue of the one of 1219, whch had been the cause of so much consternation. Nor were the incidents forgotten: some of the Brothers still thought that in going to Germany they were going to their deaths. And yet, when Elias gave out the appeal which Francis had whispered in his ear for volunteers for Germany (Francis never used compulsion upon anyone), sixty Brothers at once came forward. Behind all disputes over Rules and tendencies was still this live spirit of enthusiasm and sacrifice which made the greatness of the Order.

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As the work of the legislator was not found acceptable, and was, in the last event, not accepted, Francis set to work once more. He gave up the journeys which, in spite of his physical state, he still continued, and shut himself up in a mountain hermitage (the hermitage of Fonte Colombo, or Monte Colombo, near Rieti, according to the tradition) in the company of Brother Leone of Assisi and Brother Bonizzone of Bologna. The valley of Rieti, which Francis had certainly traversed from end to end from the very beginning of his apostolic pilgrimages, became particularly dear to him in those last years. It was rather less frequented than the valley of Spoleto, and its very outlines gave an impression of tranquil solitude. It is a level, wide plain, the bed of an ancient lake, of which traces remain in a few scattered pools, such as that at Piediluco, shut in by the tall

green tree-tops. All round the smiling and fertile plain, through which runs the clear and calm Velino, stand the Sabine and Reatine mountains, the latter range rising to the long, grey, rocky summit of Terminillo, with its mantle of snow. South of Rieti two hilly promontories open out into the plain over against the hills and distant mountains; and on the point of the eastern ridge, half-way down the slope, in a large oak-wood, is Fonte Colombo.

The Rule of 1221 was characterized by a certain looseness and want of method, and there were many repetitions and long, pious effusions. All this must have given rise to criticism; and Francis, this time, was much briefer and more precise. But, in substance, he kept his work intact. When confronted with objections, and face to face with his opponents, Francis sometimes agreed to give way, to avoid "scandal"; but later on, when alone, he recovered himself. This was the more likely to happen on this occasion when he was in the company of Brother Leo, an ardent partisan of the strict observance.

When Brother Elias received the second edition of the Rule, he felt they had reached the parting of the ways. He had great self-confidence, and he knew himself to be well supported both within and without the Order. But he felt for Francis what can only be described as a respectful awe: a subjection of mind which at times reached a positive fear. Moreover, the sincere affection that he had for Francis made him recoil from opposing him openly. To tell Francis, in so many words, that the second edition would not do – it was unthinkable. So he had recourse to an expedient: he

told him that the Rule had been lost. Cardinal Ugolino must certainly have known of this (Elias would not have ventured to consider the document and take a decision without hearing his views) and approved the "pious deceit."

Francis understood. He had now, in principle, agreed to fall in with the others, and he could not turn back. Moreover, he knew very well that behind Brother Elias was Cardinal Ugolino, and that if the latter did not accept his rule, it would not be approved by the Holy See and would remain a dead letter. But this time both sides felt that something definite must be done, and a final text drawn up, and for this the Cardinal's collaboration was essential. Ugolino, after he became Pope, himself stated that such a collaboration took place. Francis was to draw up the Rule afresh and then it was to be submitted privately to Brother Elias, to the Ministers, and to the Cardinal. To this period of revision and consultation must belong (if the anecdote has, as is probable, any historical foundation) the deputation of those Ministers who went to Brother Elias protesting that they knew the intentions of Francis in drawing up so harsh a rule: it was well understood that he was writing for himself and not for them (matters had come to this). The rebellious group was taken by Brother Elias, who desired nothing better and perhaps, as an expert politician, had himself inspired the deputation, to see Saint Francis. He, having listened to the courteous suggestions of these sons of his, raised his eyes to heaven exclaiming: "Did I not tell Thee, Lord, that they would not listen to me?" And then a voice was heard from heaven saying that the Rule

must remain as it was, because He, Christ, had dictated it. Confusion of Brother Elias and his companions, and their withdrawal in discomfiture.

In the anecdote the work of legend is evident; we know in fact that Francis did introduce changes, removing various matters that the Brethren did not like (one of them being the injunction that they should carry no provisions on a journey). The work was at last brought to an end at the Chapter of Pentecost in 1223, the last general Chapter at which Francis was present. It is probable that agreement on the final text was reached between the various parties at private meetings before, or even during, the Chapter. Matters are easily arranged in this way: just as in Parliament a preliminary understanding between Government and Committee, majority and minority, is reached by negotiations in the corridors. Papal approval had still to be obtained; but this, when Cardinal Ugolino, official protector of the Order, and in continual personal contact on its behalf with the Holy See, had expressed himself satisfied, was not in any doubt. There is, as a matter of fact, some evidence that the intervention of the Cardinal of Ostia was not, in the last years of Honorius, accepted as it had been earlier in the pontificate. But such differences, if they existed, were for quite other reasons.

In the bull "*Solet annuere*," dated November 29, 1223, the Rule was approved and promulgated. In the preamble the Franciscan formula, "This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," was paraphrased in such a way as to remove from it a somewhat perilous exuberance, as if it

had been the proclamation of a new gospel. The words now ran thus: " This is the Rule and the life of the Friars Minor in their observance of the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." A little later on, the candidates for the Order were no longer described as moved by divine inspiration, words which, to say no more, were in contradiction to the institution of the novitiate (already contained in the Rule of 1221), which presupposed that after his period of probation the novice could go away, proving that his idea had been of entirely human origin. The Ministers continued to be called " Ministers and Servants "; but the rather unduly equalitarian injunctions that no one should be called Prior, that they should wash each other's feet, and follow the Gospel precept: " Do not unto others what thou wouldst not should be done to thee," and " Obey one another of free will for charity of spirit " (sayings which might, if taken literally, be damaging to discipline) – all these were omitted. It was no longer stated that they were not bound to obey the Minister when he gave an order contrary to the Minorite life or spirit; the principle could not be denied, but it seemed better not to mention it explicitly. The control and denouncement of superiors by their inferiors, mentioned and authorized in the Rule of 1221, was also omitted. The transgressing Brother was, on the other hand, still to be reported to the Minister, except that it was no longer necessary to admonish him three times before doing so, this being regarded as a spiritual rather than a disciplinary measure, though the obligation to afford the sinner such spiritual help as might be possible, still remained.

In addition to the Ministers, who were heads of provinces, there now appear "Custodians," as heads of the subdivisions of each province; and it is laid down that both these classes of functionary are to nominate "the Minister General and Servant of the whole community," at the Chapter of Pentecost. The rank and file of the Brothers are thus excluded from the election. The post is to be held for life unless the body of electors shall judge the Minister General incapable of fulfilling his office. The Chapter of Pentecost is to be held every three years, and no longer every year, and it is no longer laid down that it shall be held at the Porziuncola.

The section regarding work is reduced to the simplest possible terms: "The Brethren to whom God gave the grace to work are to work faithfully and earnestly." The precept of 1221 has become a permission and almost in the nature of a pious work of supererogation. The clause, "Everyone is to retain the craft and profession in which he was called," is omitted; omitted also is the mention of the implements of trade, and the section on the Brothers who remain in service in another's house, no doubt because it belonged to a state of affairs that had passed away and was better forgotten. As regards preaching, the Brothers were first of all to obtain the permission of the General of the Order (no longer the Minister, as in the Rule of 1221); and preaching against the will of the bishop is expressly forbidden, this being, as we know, in accordance with the views of Francis himself.

Together with all these profound transformations of

discipline and way of life, the precepts on poverty remain untouched. It was Francis' last trench, his "*porro unum*," on which he had no notion of giving way. But this permanent element taken together with all the other changes altered the character of Franciscan poverty, marking its development from a community of labourers who owned nothing into a mendicant order properly so-called. Francis is never tired of singing hymns to the "glory of the noble Lady Poverty, who, my beloved Brethren, has made you heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven"; and he recalls how the Lord had made Himself poor. But it is no longer stated, as in the Rule of 1221, that Christ, together with the Virgin and His disciples, lived on charity; and charity is no longer defined as "the inheritance and justice due to the poor, won for us by Our Lord Jesus Christ." The definition was certainly considered dangerous, in so far as it seemed to proclaim the right of the poor to receive charity. Francis, for his part, here, as always, knew nothing of the category "right," and spoke of justice in a spiritual sense.

The prohibition against ownership of houses and buildings by the Brothers was still maintained; it was part of the irreducible Franciscan minimum. But it was no longer accompanied by the injunction that no one was to be prevented from entering them, just as the clause regarding non-resistance to violence was also omitted. The attempt to obtain Francis' consent to the formal ownership of property had been given up; but he was not allowed to prevent their defending and keeping the use of it, which, for practical purposes, meant ownership. Once this was granted,

for a permanent community for which the problem of inheritance did not arise, they had all they wanted. Time would suggest further adjustments, and there was even now, ready to hand, the expedient, used with success by Cardinal Ugolino and Francis himself, of considering the buildings (and the land accompanying them) actually in the possession of the Brothers as property belonging to the Holy See or whoever it might be.

In addition to the questions of discipline and way of life, of property and non-resistance to violence, came the question of education, which in the Rule of 1221 was dealt with from the point of view of poverty: "The clergy may have only such books as are necessary for their office, and the laymen who can read may be allowed to possess a psalter." Under these provisions it was impossible to have a library; research and controversy in defence of the dogmas and rights of the Church, and against heretics, were also out of the question; or, in other words, those very objects in which the authorities of the Church, in agreement with the majority of the Order itself, desired the Order's coöperation. Thus these prohibitions have disappeared from the Rule of 1223. It is one of the points in which the revision by Cardinal Ugolino may be most clearly seen. And we read, as if in compensation: "He who does not know his letters need not trouble to learn them." An indubitably Franciscan precept, not without grave peril to the advancement of the Order in knowledge and learning.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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EASTER TO PASSIONTIDE

THE FINAL SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE FRANCISCAN ORDER had seemed most necessary and urgent in the eyes of Ugolino and his curia, inasmuch as the general political situation and the particular situation in the district in which the Order had its origin were extremely delicate. The coronation of Frederick II, on November 22, 1220, had marked the highest point of the idyllic relations between him and the Pontiff. The imperial renunciation of the "redeemed territories," already announced in 1219, was on that day accompanied on Frederick's part by a solemn renewal of his crusader's vow: Frederick had received his cross from the hands of the Cardinal of Ostia himself, and promised that he would set sail by August of the following year. Immediately after his coronation, the Emperor had proclaimed a series of extremely important enactments, highly favourable to the Church, in condemnation of heretics and violations of ecclesiastical liberty. Cæsar and Pontiff had never drawn so near together. But it remained doubtful whether the seeds sown by Honorius and Frederick would really bring forth roses. Frederick did not go on a crusade next year, nor in any of the years following: throughout the six remaining years of the pontificate of Honorius there was a succession of postponements accom-

panied by threats of excommunication. Frederick had too much to do at home, and the crusades began to be of little interest to any outside the papal court. But the delay was a serious matter for the Papacy, especially after the miserable end of the Egyptian expedition. The mismanagement of the latter and the quarrel between Cardinal Pelagio and John, King of Jerusalem, had hastened the catastrophe, just at the moment when Francis was returning home. The march on Cairo, ordered by the legate in face of the general opinion, though the enemy capital had been captured, had led to its surrender once more into the hands of the Sultan; and to ransom the army they had to agree to the cession of Damietta and the evacuation of the country. The laws against the heretics and in defence of the ecclesiastical liberty had been a triumph for the Church; but on his mission of 1221 to Tuscany and Lombardy, Cardinal Ugolino had been able to grasp, if he did not know it before, the difference between an imperial edict and the reality of the Italian communes. He had seen with his own eyes the clergy of Lucca and Milan boycotted by the communal authorities, the former for not having been willing to contribute to the expenses of repairing a bridge, the latter for the Archbishop's excommunication of certain citizens of Monza. The struggles between the nobles and the people were at their height, and the popular party threatened to prevail, ignoring the Cardinal's efforts to pacify the cities and safeguard the position of the nobles. The argument of the crusade, employed to bring about

peace within the cities and put an end to war between the communes, had not sufficient force.

But the postponement of the crusade was not the only doubtful point in the Church's relations with the Empire. Frederick was Emperor and King of Sicily as well. He had assured the Pontiff that it was merely a question of a personal union, but the fact remained that one and the same person was in command both north and south of Rome. The pincers were there, though for the moment their grip was not felt. Moreover, as regards the "Redeemed Territories," Frederick's demeanour was not clear, or, rather, threatened to become too much so. In his interview with the Pope at Veroli in April, 1222, he had obstinately tried to raise the question of the cession of the Duchy of Spoleto. This and the March of Ancona seemed to him two of the most important and valuable provinces of Italy, wealthy and full of promising recruits for his army; and the surrender of his claim to them grew more irksome to him every day. His High Steward, Gonzelino, the imperial legate in Tuscany, had made a large number of inhabitants of his two provinces take the oath of fidelity to the Emperor; and for the Duchy of Spoleto he supported a son of the late Duke Conrad, Berthold, while an elder brother continued to hold his father's ducal title. Frederick had repeatedly disowned Gonzelino; but he was not believed at Rome. And in the mean while, on the soil of his Duchy, in the highly important city of Perugia, which commanded the road into Tuscany, the disorders, which had been quiescent for a few years, had broken out once more, and his

"*milites*" were forced to go about in companies, in defiance of all the policy pursued by Honorius and the Cardinal here and elsewhere. Honorius III hastened to intervene at Perugia, bringing back the nobles and dissolving the citizens' associations, including those of the various crafts. But the peace and the papal settlement were of brief duration.

Francis also intervened at Perugia, but in his own way and at an earlier date. The lamentations of the neighbours of Perugia against the tyranny of the city had at last reached the hermitage of Greccio in the Val di Rieti, in which he was staying at the moment; and one day the Saint suddenly set forth, telling his companions that the vengeance of God was about to descend upon that city. His purpose was not simply to recall the claims of peace and charity, but to reproach the authorities for their behaviour. In the Piazza Maggiore, where the fountain of Nicolò Pisano is still to be seen, he addressed a large crowd. But the nobles did not want him to preach; and they fell to galloping about the piazza making a great clatter with their knightly exercises. The Saint bade them be silent because he had come to preach in the name of God; and they took as a pretext for not listening to him the fact that the speaker was from Assisi. (The hostility between the two cities remained traditional.) He reproved the Perugians because instead of showing themselves, by their modest conduct, grateful to God for having made them powerful, they had become swollen with pride and oppressed their neighbours. God had chastised them with the whip of civil war, and

they would suffer more tribulations than they had been able to inflict upon the people they had oppressed. Shortly afterwards the disturbances did, in fact, come to a head, and the nobles were forced into exile. This was in the spring of 1223.

A few months before, at Bologna, at the Assumption of 1222, he had preached peace, not between nobles and people, but between the various factions of the nobility. The original theme of his discourse had been, in fact, quite different and of a theological tenor: "Men, angels, and devils." But Francis always came down to the realities of the moral life, and for him the angels meant the counsellors of peace among men, just as the devils stood for those who stirred up discord. His clothing was shabby, his appearance mean, and his demeanour quite unimpressive; but his words were extraordinarily effective, and he was often the means of bringing about peace. Men and women crowded round him to touch the hem of his garment and to take away some small fragment of it as a precious and miraculous relic.

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THESE are perhaps the last two discourses that Francis ever delivered in a city. Both of them were inspired by the immediate intention of bringing about public peace, as if Francis felt now more strongly than ever the necessity of working directly on public affairs in accordance with his ideals. But his strength was now beginning to fail him, and

the apostolic preaching of Francis began to diminish just at the time of the papal promulgation of the Rule for his order.

Notwithstanding his disillusions and his sacrifices, Francis could still hope that nothing that was essential had been completely lost. The Rule authorized by the Pope kept intact what for him was the fundamental principle of all: that of poverty, of possessing nothing. All the rest (even what was no longer included in the Rule) seemed to him to lead back to that principle, understood and applied in his spirit, and to the general profession of apostolic life with which the Rule began. For his part, he had done as much as he could, and from now onwards the practical application of the Rule was not a matter for him: he could provide only an example. From day to day his strength diminished, and his state of health grew continually worse; his life became a succession of days and nights of suffering. Moreover, his moral energy had produced all that could be expected of it. The sower had sown unweariedly (it was nearly twenty years since the date of his conversion); his hand was tired, and his store by now exhausted. Whether the harvest would be good and plenteous, whether the tares would be destroyed, or would eat up the good seed, was God's secret, and the end must be left to Him. A tranquil resignation, a weary serenity, came over his spirit, though sometimes alternating with suddenly awakened impulses to action and command. His conscience was at peace, though his heart was a little sad; he had done for men all

that he could in accordance with the Lord's command. If they now seemed to avoid him and do without him, and made him understand that he was no longer necessary, and even something of an encumbrance, he could still accept the repose that was offered, and indeed forced upon him. God remained.

Like every true leader of men he had learned to do without their company. In this preacher to the multitudes there had always been the stuff of a solitary. Today circumstances and the divine will were leading him on that path which he had so often been tempted to follow. Withdrawal into a solitary communion with God, hitherto a forbidden indulgence, a selfish satisfaction, today became lawful and indeed his duty. For so many years he had daily given his soul for that of others; he had won the right to retire within himself and seek God for himself alone.

Thus, when the final Rule had been drawn up and promulgated from Rome, Francis set out in December of 1223 for the hermitages in the valley of Rieti. This time he chose the hermitage of Greccio, on a wooded spur almost hidden in a curve of the Sabine mountains, with the plain stretching at his feet from west to east as far as the Apennines, shadowy and vast in the far distance.

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Christmas was at hand. Passiontide is sad and solemn, Easter joyous and triumphant; but Christmas is the true festival of humanity. The season of the year, which invites us to gather in warmth round the family hearth, the white

expanses of snow, the gleaming threads of poetry interwoven by devout popular fancy into the web of the Gospel story (the stall, the ox and the ass, and the shepherds carrying their offerings), the vision of the *Bambino,* naked and helpless like all that is born of woman: all combines to give to Christmas its character of warm and deep humanity. Francis felt it more than anyone else. He would have had the Emperor pass a law that on Christmas day all the poor should be given good food by the rich. And not human beings alone: he would have liked the animals to take their part in the festival, beginning, as was only fair, with the ox and the ass, which the peasants were to feed extra well that day, and even the birds (above all, his sisters the larks), for whom corn should be scattered on the roads. On one occasion when a Brother reminded him that Christmas fell on Friday in that year, he replied that he would not give the name Friday (an unlucky one in popular credence) to the day on which the Babe was born to us. When he called Jesus the *Bambino,* he grew infinitely tender: and when he uttered the word "Bethlehem" he stressed his voice on the first syllable in a childlike imitation of a bleat of a lamb, the lamb Jesus. None before him had realized the Christ's humanity with such affectionate intimacy, and so plastic an imagination. The life of Jesus was a constant and present reality of his daily life. On the Feast of Saint Matthew the Evangelist, Francis gave a devout and tender impersonation of Jesus. He could not impersonate the *Bambino,* but he could present him in effigy to his own eyes and those of the populace.

He applied to a certain attached friend of his, one Giovanni, a farmer of Greccio, and asked him to construct a manger. This was not entirely an innovation: it had been done a few times at Rome, and possibly Francis had heard about it. But for the majority of Christendom and for the people of Umbria it was something quite new, and it seems that Francis thought it necessary (it was either his own idea, or a prudent suggestion from outside) to ask for the Pope's authorization. So a room was arranged as a stall, with the manger in the middle, the ox and the ass eating the hay, and in the manger the figure of the *Bambino,* perhaps a statuette of painted wood. All round it were lighted candles, and at the far end an altar, at which the priest said Mass at midnight, and Francis took the deacon's part, singing the Gospel. His physical weakness had disappeared: he sang with a sweet, clear, and penetrating voice. All the assembled peasants looked on and listened, rapt in a dream: they felt they were in paradise. When the Mass was over, Francis preached, and, except for his discourse to the birds at Bevagna, this must have been the dearest and most satisfying to his heart.

The hay from the manger was preserved as a relic and marvellous stories are told of it: cures of sick animals who were given it to eat, labouring women who were relieved in their agony by its touch. A church was built on the site. But neither miracles nor temples could avail to reproduce that night of religious creation, in which Francis showed the peoples of the West how it was possible, in holy devotion and humble peace, to look with eyes enlightened by

faith upon those sacred places which, in this material existence, such mighty force of arms had for centuries failed to win back.

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At Christmas at Greccio Francis had recovered his contact with humanity: not with the heads of his Order, or the ecclesiastical and lay authorities, or the inquisitive and arrogant populations of the cities, but with a humble and nameless crowd of peasants and shepherds. Plunged in ever deeper meditation, his spirit began to turn from the rosy, infantile figure of Jesus the *Bambino*, and from that, still more filled with serene life, of the Divine Master, wandering among men, in poverty and joy, on the shores of the lake of Galilee, to the mournful and tragic contemplation of the Passion of Our Lord. The thought of Jesus crucified had already, in the far-off years of his conversion, moved his piety and love to tears and lamentations. Now his meditation was more collected, quieter, and more poignant; and he began to feel the need of a stricter and more austere solitude. So Francis turned his steps towards La Verna, the mountain which Orlando, Lord of Chiusi in the Casentino, had given for his use eleven years before. Situated between the deep valleys of the Arno and the Tiber, La Verna is not higher than Subasio. But it stands by itself, a peak rising suddenly and abruptly from the mass of the mountain, into an almost precipitous spear-head of grey, scarred rock, bursting forth from the green hollows of thick woods. The way to La Verna leads through fertile valleys and

across the gentle slopes of some low hills, dotted here and there with clumps of oaks and cypresses. But the sky is often piled up with clouds; and against them, high on the far horizon, loom the great mountains, vast and majestic in their solemn symmetry.

Francis went up to La Verna in the summer of 1224. A few of the Brethren, his more devoted followers, accompanied him; and their main preoccupation was to keep the indiscreetly inquisitive population at a distance. This time he meant to be really alone. One of his companions was Brother Leo, and tradition adds the names of Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo Tancredi, both of them intimate and beloved friends of the Saint. It was one of his maxims (he has recorded it in writing) that, when going into retreat in a hermitage, there should not be more than three or four together. Two were to act as " mothers " and live the life of Martha, providing for all the daily necessities. The " better part," the life of the Magdalene, fell to the two others, or the other: contemplation, the pure life of the spirit. Each one of the four, again in accordance with the Saint's injunctions, had his own cell, in which he recited his prayers and slept. Each one was by himself, in silence, from sunset, when the office of compline was said, until the third hour (nine in the morning). Then "mothers " and " sons " met together, and the sons asked the mothers in the name of God for alms – the daily sustenance that the latter had collected. They alone (Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo, in our case) maintained some contact with the outer world, or, in other words, with the peasants on the

upper slopes of the mountain, and a few shepherds in the woods. The two Brothers did some work for them and received in exchange bread, milk, and green vegetables. They drew water from the fresh streams that plashed down the slopes round them; and in this way they prepared what was necessary for their common dinner. When Francis was shut in his cell, no one visited him, not even his companions.

The feast of Assumption came and went and Francis began the fast that he always kept from that day to the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. He had a great devotion to the angels, particularly to Saint Michael: he knew from his breviary that the Lord had placed in his care the souls of the blessed in the " Paradise of Joy." Between the Assumption and Saint Michael's day comes the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, which recalled to Francis, not the victory of the Byzantine Emperor over the King of Persia, of which he certainly knew nothing, but the Crucifixion of the Redeemer and the first adoration of His cross. His meditations began more and more to concentrate on Christ's Passion. When he opened the Gospels to look for light, on the page that caught his eye he always came upon a prediction or an account of the Passion. Thus his whole spirit became more than ever absorbed in this meditation, into which he was drawn by the condition of his mind. His longings for martyrdom among the infidels came back to his heart, longings that had remained unsatisfied; indeed, he had fallen upon other and more bitter tortures, though not of the body, among his Christian Brothers.

One morning (it was near the feast of the Cross),

while he was deep in a silent prayer that was almost a trance of contemplation, he was suddenly rapt into an ecstasy, and a miraculous vision burst upon his eyes. A seraph flew down to him from the heights of heaven, as described by the Prophet Isaiah, with two wings outstretched in flight, two raised above his head, and two folded to cover his body. But his body was not that of a celestial and triumphant angel, but of one crucified: hands and feet extended and nailed to the cross. The marvellous beauty of the sight made the heart of the visionary glow with joy; but the crucifixion of the angelic body filled him with a fearful awe. The crucified seraph murmured some words to Francis and then disappeared. When he came back to himself and began to meditate upon the meaning of the vision, Francis saw on the palms of his hands and on the upper sides of his feet a round excrescence like the head of a nail, and on the opposite side another such, blunted and bent like the point of a nail driven through. On his right side he could feel a wound; and quickly tearing off his habit, he discovered a real and bleeding gash. Like the winged seraph, Francis too was crucified. The miraculous marks were extremely sensitive, especially in his side, from which blood flowed repeatedly, so much so as to stain his garments.

At the sight of his body thus stamped with the marks of the crucifixion Francis felt not merely physical pain, but a holy anguish of the spirit. He hid the divine marks as long as he could, in a kind of jealous grief. He kept his hands concealed in the long sleeves of his habit, and if

anyone wanted to take his hand or kiss it he let only his fingers be seen. He would wash only the extremities of his hands when others were present. But, in spite of all his precautions, the marvellous secret became known; and from time to time someone, whether by accident, or inquisitive or pious guile, would manage to get a sight of it. Francis was always extremely annoyed; and he answered sharply, almost rudely, anyone who questioned him. "Mind your own business," said he one day to a Brother who, noticing the stigmata on his feet, asked him what they were. Another, having taken his habit away one day to dust it and found blood upon it, asked him what it was. Francis put a finger on his eye and answered: "Why do you not also ask what this is?" His intimates knew what he felt; and so, when he happened to remove his clothes in their presence, they looked another way.

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The mystery of the stigmata, which leapt from mouth to mouth like a mountain stream down the scarps of a rock, increased the respect in which the Father was held by the Order, even before his death, when the matter was revealed and published to the world at large. The last years of the life of Francis were already encompassed by the halo of sanctity. His abandonment of the control of the Order and his retirement from daily commerce with humanity contributed to this result. Raised far above the disputes of daily life, with all the added prestige of solitude, which made him more difficult of access, and for that reason more

rare and precious, Francis was no longer, in the eyes of the Brothers and the people, a man of flesh and blood, but already a saint of heaven to be worshipped humbly from a distance: a vision rather than an example, a dispenser of grace rather than a moral guide.

And yet Francis would still have wished to be a man and at work among men. When he had been in the fullness of his missionary energy, the Spirit had driven him at times into solitude, to taste the joy of a hermit's life. Now that this life was his to be enjoyed to the full, a nostalgia for its opposite took possession of him – a longing to return to his missionary work and to preaching. He could no longer travel on foot because the stigmata, combined with the weakness that was the result of his malady, made it painful for him to set foot to ground. He went about riding upon an ass, a steed that even Jesus had allowed himself. When, as he journeyed from one place to another, the crowds ran to meet him as they had been used to do, surging over the fields and trampling down the crops, he would still sometimes turn back and preach to them.

He was always on the best of terms with the people, so faithful and so eager; and he would have liked to be on such terms with his Brothers, for without them his work might come to nothing, since, when he was dead, who would carry it on? But the people were more loyal than the Brothers. All his sons reverenced in Francis the saintly imitator of Christ, the glory of the Order, and went about the world fortified by his fame. But they preferred to carry on the affairs of the Order in their own way. They began

inevitably to develop into a sect of Brothers specializing in the art of government, and for that very reason desirous of public offices, eager to assume them and slow to lay them down. This was in exact contradiction to what Francis had wished. At the instance of the Roman curia the Brothers began to be involved in ecclesiastical disputes, and to plead on their own account; the papal court began to intervene in the affairs of the Order and to grant it privileges, such as the privilege of celebrating Mass in time of interdict, and of using a portable altar for the celebration of the Mass in the hermitages; and finally, in the last year of the Saint's life, certain Friars Minor were appointed bishops, and permission was given to use money in case of need. There may have been excellent reasons for all this – indeed, for the mission to Morocco they were obvious; but Francis, when confronted with this new iniquity, must have longed more than ever to bring back his Order to its original principles, still so near in point of time, though so far off in fact. He thought to set an example himself, and he would say to his companions that now was the time to begin to serve the Lord, since they had made but little progress hitherto. And, in very truth returning to his principles, he proposed once more to enter upon the service of the lepers, his "little brothers in Christ."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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THE TESTAMENT

THESE WERE THE LAST MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MAN of action, of the leader of men, but they were necessarily momentary and without effect. In fact, since activity was no longer allowed him, and he had less opportunity of setting an example, in these last years Francis had recourse to the pen. It was an unfamiliar instrument to him, for he had never overcome the material difficulty of writing. But he avoided this by dictating; indeed, his eyes would have given out if he had tried to write with his own hand for long. As regards the matter, composition was easy, for the words surged up to his lips from the very fullness of his heart.

He addressed "words of admonition" to all the Brethren, bidding them to collect and set down his discourses at the Chapters, and all his spiritual conversations. The theme of poverty is not merely not prominent, as might have been expected, but is hardly mentioned; perhaps on this occasion Francis thought that poverty was a result rather than a principle, a point of arrival rather than a point of departure. It is the spiritual passions, more properly so called, with which he deals: pride, vanity, envy, anger, and, above all, their root and origin, which this confident connoisseur of souls finds in selfish pride, or rather, in the ascetic language of the Saint, in "the evil of the

individual will," identified with the forbidden fruit. On the other side, obedience (only too deficient, as Francis knew by bitter experience, in his own followers) is exalted in the most uncompromising terms, though the concept is used in a broad and spiritual way. True obedience is the abandonment of all a man possesses, including his own body, into the entire charge of his superiors; and it is perfect obedience to suffer persecutions rather than be separated from the Brothers, and to give his life for them. And immediately afterwards the authorities to whom this obedience is due are warned that they must not take pride in it, nor become attached to their position. The subjection of the former has, as its necessary corollary, a disinterested humility on the part of the latter. No one is to grow vain of his knowledge, however great it may be, since the one thing that counts is to serve God (" whatsoever a man is in the face of God, that is he, and no more "), and all creatures under heaven serve God better than men. Even knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is the letter that killeth when it is reduced to the pride of learning and becomes an instrument of gain, instead of leading to the spiritual fulfilment of God's word. Reproof of sin may itself be sinful, when it is not solely dictated by charity and develops into anger with one's neighbours. Even prayer and abstinence are in vain if they are followed by resentment of some trifling injury. Blessed are the poor in spirit, who love those that hurt them; blessed are the peacemakers, who endure the tribulations of this world for the love of God; blessed are the humble, who do not take more pride in the good works

that God does by their means than in what he does through others. Blessed is the Brother who does not, of his own will, exalt himself, and woe to him who will not, of his own will, abase himself. Blessed is the superior who loves his sick Brother, who cannot do what he ought, as much as the one who is well and can do his work. And blessed is he who loves and respects his Brother when he is far away, and says nothing behind his back that he could not charitably say to his face.

In this way Francis in his "Admonitions" repeated the Gospel beatitudes (though he introduces here and there threats of "woe" to certain transgressors) and adapted them to the spiritual needs of his Brothers. Nothwithstanding some want of arrangement and numerous repetitions, the little work forms a systematic whole. Only the first paragraph stands out from the rest, as not being of moral import, but religio-sacramental in intention – the exaltation and adoration of Christ in the Eucharist; and, at the end, in his last blessing, and his last warning, to the Brothers who reverence and those who offend the priests, the only ministers of the body of Christ, he refers to this once more. The devotion to the Eucharist and the sanctity of the Mass is the theme of a letter "to the Chapter when I was ill" (the Chapter of 1224); and here the theme develops into a vigorous exhortation to the Minorite priests to celebrate the sacrifice with "pure hands and hearts," accompanied by a lyrical outburst of admiration for, and gratitude to, Christ in the Sacrament. He also enjoins the Brothers to gather together and protect from every outrage "the written words

of God"; by this he did not mean only extracts from the Bible, but also any piece of writing, because it always contained the letters composing the words of God, and more especially the name of Jesus Christ, and the formula for the consecration of the Eucharist. This anxiety shows that the spirituality of Francis was not lacking in certain elements of narrow scrupulosity, which had already developed into a somewhat literal application of the Gospel precepts. In another composition, addressed partly to priests in general and partly to the Custodians of the Order, the Saint returns to the theme of reverence for the Eucharist, this time more especially in connection with the vessels and wine containing the particles. On this subject he had wished to insert clauses in the Rule, or perhaps had inserted them in his own version; but the general Chapter of 1223 rejected them. They must have seemed unduly meticulous and almost vexatious; and possibly the Chapter feared disputes with the secular clergy if they raised any question that concerned the administration of churches. Francis, however, was tenacious of his ideas; and what he had not succeeded in introducing into the Rule was included in these writings in terms of the most earnest recommendation and even command. The letter to the general Chapter concludes thus: "I, Brother Francis, say in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to Brother Elias, Minister General, and to all the Ministers General that are to follow him, and to all the Custodians and Guardians, present and to come, that they are to keep this writing, guard it jealously, and observe it and cause it to be observed." There is also

a similar recommendation in the document last named above.

It was not only to his Brothers that Francis wrote thus authoritatively, nor was he concerned only with advice on specific matters. The moral comprehensiveness of the "Admonitions" may be found also in the "Letter to All the Faithful," which the Saint indited to "all Christians, religious, clergy, and laymen, male and female, as many as were to be found in the whole world." He justified the document by insisting on his obligation to serve all men; and because his condition of health would not allow him to go about visiting the faithful, he sent to them by letter "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the words of the Holy Spirit." Style and matter were those of an inspired apostle, even though the letter consisted almost entirely of quotations and reminiscences from the Holy Scriptures, almost all from the New Testament. The mysteries of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Passion, injunctions regarding Confession and Communion, are combined in this document with more specifically Franciscan recommendations regarding simplicity and humility, love of one's enemies, charity and almsgiving, and the obligation of those in authority (the reference here is to secular governments) to administer justice mercifully if they would obtain mercy from God, and to be the servants and not the masters of their brethren. Thus we may see from the direct written evidence of Francis himself that his conception was universal, and that he regarded the principles so strictly and uncompromisingly imposed on his Brothers as good and necessary

for all. The letter closes with a lively picture (no doubt taken from his oral discourses) of the rich man near unto death, who is told by the priest to restore what he has gained by unfair means, and replies that he cannot do so because he has left it by will to his relatives.

Just as in the writings addressed to his Brethren, here too Francis concludes by calling on his readers to hear and obey his message. " And those who cannot read are to have it read to them frequently and they are to learn it by heart and obey it humbly for the rest of their lives. Any who fail to do so will answer for it to me on the Day of Judgment before the throne of Christ." The apostle and missionary feels himself to be invested with authority over all men, and accomplishes his task by means of the written word, since he can no longer go about preaching in person.

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It was Francis' intention to put before all men those supreme moral teachings which he had tried more especially to embody in his Order. But he knew better than anyone how far the Order had fallen short of his design; and he also knew (indeed, as we have seen, he set it down in writing) that man fulfilled the purpose of the divine harmony even less than other created things. Beyond his Brethren, beyond humanity, the eager piety of his soul ranged over the universe, and the impulse of his love reached all creatures within it.

It was at San Damiano, while he was ill, some time after his return from La Verna, that he wrote the " Hymn

to Creation." His extreme physical suffering and his depression of mind had driven him to seek a refuge with one who could always console him, Sister Clare. A straw hut had been put up for him against the wall of the monastery; and there he lay, in all the pain and darkness of his failing eyes. And his sickness and his blindness, in which Francis always saw and blessed the hand of God, were combined with a torment that seemed to him truly diabolic. Hordes of rats ran over the walls of the hut, gnawed their way inside it, defiled his humble meal, and at last were bold enough to scamper over the pallet on which he lay. The noise they made kept him from sleep and prayer; their disgusting appearance and loathsome contact made him shudder. One night he felt himself reduced almost to despair, and he turned to God, imploring His assistance, because he could do no more. Then, in his inmost heart, there arose the conviction, assured and joyful as it had always been, that at the end of his ordeal he would find the reward of Paradise.

By morning he had recovered his serenity and told his companions one of his usual parables: "If the Emperor gives to one of his servants an entire kingdom, ought not that servant to be grateful? and if he gives him the whole of his Empire, ought not that servant to be more grateful still? So ought I to be grateful for my tribulations, and give thanks to God, because, while I am still in the flesh, He has given me the certainty that I shall enter into His kingdom, wherefore, in praise of Him, and for our consolation and the edification of the world, I will make a new song of

praise, on all the creatures of the Lord whom we make use of every day, and without whom we cannot live, though we are not grateful to Him for their help, and often offend Him in them."

He lay thoughtful and silent for a time and then began to recite as follows, singing:

" O most high, almighty, good Lord God, to thee belong praise, glory, honour, and all blessing!

" Praised be my Lord God with all his creatures; and especially our brother the sun, who brings us the day, and who brings us the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendour: O Lord, he signifies to us thee!

" Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.

" Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which thou upholdest in life all creatures.

" Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble, and precious, and clean.

" Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty, and strong.

" Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits, and flowers of many colours, and grass.

"Praise ye, and bless ye the Lord, and give thanks unto him, and serve him with great humility." [1]

The crisis of anguish was passed. The resignation and sadness were transformed once more into serenity and joy. He was so delighted with his poem and its melody that he wanted to get all his companions to learn the hymn, and played with the idea of summoning Fra Pacifico, the "King of Verse," and sending him with a company of Brothers to sing his hymn of praise through all the world. After their leader had preached to the people, they would all sing the hymn in chorus and then say to their hearers: "We are God's jesters; pay us with your conversion." For him God's servant and God's jester should be the same, because it was right that men's hearts should be raised to God in joy; and of course he wished his Brothers to be jesters of this kind, and the best of all.

An almost immediate opportunity offered of putting the notion into practice. He was still ill, in the hut by San Damiano, when Assisi experienced the delights of one of those conflicts between the civil and religious authorities to which the cities of Upper Italy had become used for some time. Bishop Guido, who had a certain tendency towards litigation, excommunicated the *Podestà*, who retaliated with a boycott. None of the citizens could sell anything to the Bishop or buy anything from him, or enter into any sort of contract with him. Francis thought it a shame that the Friars Minor, God's servants and jesters, should not assist

[1] Version by MATTHEW ARNOLD: *Essays in Criticism*, First Series

in making peace. The Bishop and the *Podestà* were asked to present themselves with their attendants on the Piazza opposite the Bishop's palace; and he sent to them two Brothers, who were to beg them all, in his name, to deign to listen to a hymn which he had composed. It was the "Hymn to Creation"; but after the verses of praise to the earth the Brothers did not bring the hymn to an end with the final benediction. Francis had added four more lines:

"*Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for his love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, for thou, O most Highest, shalt give them a crown.*"

All anger was appeased: excommunication and boycott were forgotten. The *Podestà* knelt down before the Bishop, saying that he was ready to forgive and to make amends for the love of God and of Brother Francis; in that hour he would have forgiven one who had killed his brother or his son. The Bishop raised him up and embraced him, confessing that he was prone to anger, though, as Bishop, it was his duty to practise Christian humility. That day, thanks to God's jester, was one of triumph for religion and for art.

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The Saint's condition of health grew continually worse. He dragged on without thinking of medicine, in which he had probably little confidence, and which possibly seemed to him a transgression against God's will. But his

companions were not of the same way of thinking and wanted to make some attempt to save him. Father Elias, the General of the Order, and the Cardinal-protector, whose affection for Francis was all the deeper for the divergence of their views from his, tried to make him see that it was his duty to get well, and that it was a sin not to do so. He did not contradict them, and one day in a conversation with one of the Brothers he recognized that for twenty years past he had neglected his body, though it had always been faithful and devoted to him, and carried out all his wishes. And he placed himself in the hands of doctors, well knowing that it was but to undergo new martyrdoms.

His first treatment at the Porziuncola and San Damiano was useless. His friends thought of consulting celebrated doctors, the experts of the papal court, which was then at Rieti, Cardinal Ugolino being there as well. Francis was carried thither and stayed at first in the parish of San Fabiano (now called Santa Maria della Foresta), not far outside the city, and everybody – citizens and country people – flocked out to visit him there. It was the month of September, and the priest thought they had destroyed the vines near his cottage. As a matter of fact, the vintage was extremely abundant, as Francis had promised, to console him. What had been destroyed was Francis' peace and quiet, at any rate in the material sense, though he was never more in need of it; and he was consequently carried to the hermitage in Monte Colombo. There the eminent papal physician decided that, to get rid of the tumours that were obscuring Francis' sight, cauterization was necessary from

the jaw to the brow of the eye most affected. When the poor man saw the hot iron before his face, he nearly fainted. But he took courage, and spoke to " Brother Fire," begging him to treat him kindly, him who had loved him and sung of him as a creature of the Lord. Then he prayed to God to give him strength to endure the torment, and blessed the glowing iron. Fra Leone and the other Brothers who were with him fled from the room. When they came back, Francis said that he had felt nothing, and the doctor testified that he had not moved: his ecstatic prayer must have providentially deprived him of sensibility. After the cauterization, the veins between the ear and the eye were cut; and then another doctor again had recourse to the red-hot iron, to try and pierce the film over his eyes.

All this learned savagery was fruitless. His eyes remained as they were before; and his general condition, to which these important medical men do not seem to have paid much attention, grew worse. The autumn passed in these agonizing experiments; when the winter cold began, Saint Francis was carried down from the hermitage to the warmer and more comfortable bishop's palace at Rieti. Though he could do nothing for himself, nor others for him, the Saint still found strength to help others both in body and in mind. He gave away a coat which his " guardian Brother " had got for him, to a poor old woman, and maintained that it was an act of restitution. It was always his theory that a thing must be given to whoever needed it most; otherwise its possession was theft.

From Rieti, in the company of another doctor, he went

to Siena and stayed for a while in a hermitage outside the walls. Disturbed as he was there, by the troublesome curiosity of a certain Brother who arrived from a distance and managed by a trick, with the complicity of the "Guardian," to see the stigmata, and by certain theological inquiries put to him, with doubtful intent, by a Dominican doctor, he consoled himself, as his custom was, in the company of animals. A gentleman of the neighbourhood had given him a pheasant as a delicacy for his weak stomach. He had preserved its life and it became greatly attached to him; the Saint would caress it and talk to it, and the creature, when taken away, immediately returned to the cell. The doctor, from motives of pious affection, asked for and was given it, but in his house the bird would no longer eat, and he had to take it back to Brother Francis, in whose company it immediately recovered its appetite.

At Siena, in April, his stomach and liver became more seriously affected, and one night he vomited blood for hours together. His companions began the lamentations for the dying and begged for his blessing and a memento for themselves and for the rest of the Brothers. The sick man told them to call Fra Benedetto, a priest of the Order, whom Francis kept in his company so as to be able to hear Mass every day; and he dictated to him a short will, as far as his strength would allow. In this he gave his blessing to all the Brothers in the Religion, and all who should enter it in the ages that were to come; and he summed up his wishes and his intentions for all the Brothers, present and future, in these three points: they were to love each other as he loved

them all and always had loved them; they were always to love and to follow Lady Poverty; and they were always to be faithful and submissive to the prelates and priests of the Church.

Brother Elias, on hearing that Francis had grown worse, hurried to his side. He was unwilling, as were all the Assisans, that Francis should die far away from Assisi, and that others should become possessed of the precious relic of his body. Francis, too, preferred to die in his own land, and said so. Advantage was taken of a slight improvement, and he was moved, as the first stage of the journey, to Celle, near Cortona. There he had a serious relapse; his belly and legs became swollen, and his stomach refused practically any food. But the Saint himself insisted, none the less, that he should be carried to Assisi, and Brother Elias was equally anxious for this to be done. The distance in a straight line would not have been great – about eighty kilometres. But there was a risk in passing through the territory of Perugia, because the Perugians, ancient enemies and rivals of the Assisans, might find some pretext to detain the Saint, in order subsequently to obtain possession of his body. Thus the material legacy of Francis was already a matter for anxiety and dispute, though he would have preferred them to seek after the moral legacy of his teaching and example, which was at the disposal of all who desired it. But the pursuit of a legacy of that kind was a harder matter.

So they made a long circuit round by Gubbio and Nocera. The territory of Gubbio was overrun by wolves, and

some of the peasants, observing Francis in the evening passing by on his donkey, advised him to stay the night in a neighbouring abbey because there was a risk that his mount might be eaten by a wolf. "I have never done any harm to brother wolf; why should he eat my brother ass who carries me?" answered the Saint; and he went forward. At Bagnara there came to meet him an escort of Assisans on horseback to take charge of their living treasure; and so they arrived at Assisi, where Francis took up his abode in the Bishop's palace. The whole city was overjoyed at the return of the Saint, for they thought that the precious relic was now assured to them and would make the fortune and the glory of the city. But to make more sure, the Commune had a guard posted round the palace at night.

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At Assisi there was a lull in the Saint's malady; and he took advantage of it to draw up his Testament on a somewhat larger scale, with more definite indications of the needs of the Order, which even in his dangerous state were quite clearly before his mind. Indeed, Francis had never displayed such lucidity of thought, such intensity and clearness of purpose as in that document.

The fundamental theme is that what Francis has done he has done by divine inspiration. God had first brought him to repentance by sending him among the lepers and changing his disgust at them into such sweet service of the mind and body. God had imbued him with that devotion for churches that inspired that simple prayer which he

taught to his companions: " We adore thee, Lord," etc. God sent him companions, " and none showed me what I must do, but God Himself, who revealed to me that I must live in accordance with the Holy Gospel." But together with this personal inspiration there is always the devotion to the Church and her ministers: he would not preach against the will of the humblest parish priest, not even if he had been another Solomon himself. And once more he lays down the motive for this submission: it is because the priests consecrate and administer the Eucharist, which is all we may know of the Son of God upon earth.

In a few sentences, short and precise, Francis records his own way of life and that of his earliest companions, the only one that even now he considered admissible for the Order. " Those who came to live this life gave to the poor all that they had. And they were content with one habit, patched within and without, a girdle, and a pair of breeches. They wanted no more. Our priests said their office like other priests, and laymen said their paternoster. And they were glad to be in church. And we were ignorant and subject to all. And I worked with my hands, and I wish to work still " (he did not yet believe he was going to die). " And I earnestly wish that all the Brothers shall work at an honest trade. If any of them do not know a trade, they must learn one; not for greed of gain, but for the sake of good example and to banish idleness. And when they get no recompense for their labour, then they must resort to the table of the Lord, and ask alms from door to door." In dwelling-places and churches they are to be guests and not owners,

and they must not accept a lodging on any terms that may "transgress against Holy Poverty."

The theme of poverty, which is hardly mentioned in the "Admonitions," here returns in triumph, and is fully developed and expanded. And with it the renunciation of any external support, any instrument other than the pure and simple word of God: "I earnestly command all the Brethren to obedience in this, that wherever they may be, they are not to take upon themselves to ask for any authorization from the Roman curia, either directly or through the intervention of any person, either for their churches or for any other place, either under the pretext of preaching, or on the grounds of the persecution of their bodies; but wherever they are not welcomed, they are to pass into another country and do penance, with God's blessing."

Francis laid his authority on the Brothers in this document. It was not a question of merely offering recommendations. "This must not be looked on as another Rule. It is my warning and my Testament, so that we may observe the Rule we have undertaken before God, and with the authority of the Catholic Church." The Will must be kept and read together with the Rule. Both of them are to be observed without subtle interpretations, or "glosses," but in simplicity of mind. In truth, in Francis' mind the Testament was the true and final Rule, his ideal reaffirmed in all its fullness and vigour at the extreme point of his life.

There was also a Testament for Clare and her companions; but for them Francis thought that a few lines

would be enough, perhaps because he was more certain of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano than of his own Brethren. "I, the humble Brother Francis, desire you to follow the life and poverty of Our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Mother, and continue therein until the end. And I beg you, my dear Sisters, and I counsel you, to live always this most holy life of poverty. And watch well that ye are not led away therefrom by any teaching or counsel."

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In the Testament there is no talk of death: there is no reference to it except such as is implied in his very words. Francis hoped to go on living and return to the contest, and sometimes he was seized by one of his old impulses of holy wrath. One day, suddenly leaping from his bed, he cried out like a man in delirium: "Who are they that take my Religion and my Brethren from me? Let me go to the general Chapter, and they shall know my will." But there was no Chapter that year.

It was a doctor of Arezzo, Bongiovanni, his old friend, who was to put an end to his hopes and bring before his mind the end that was at hand. He came to pay him a visit and Francis asked him what he thought about his dropsy. His tone was tremulous with the human yearning for life, which had not yet failed him. Bongiovanni began by evading a precise answer: "Brother," said he, "all shall be accomplished in accordance with the grace of God." But Francis insisted, saying that he did not fear death: life and death were all the same to him; God's will

be done (and from this resigned indifference it may still be observed that life was dear to him). Then the doctor took courage, and confessed that his malady was incurable, humanly speaking, and that he would be dead by the end of September or the beginning of October.

In the last four months Francis had constantly made his faithful companions, Angelo and Leone, sing the "Hymn to Creation"; so much so that Brother Elias had been afraid that all this singing might give rise to a scandal in the city (but the Saint had paid no attention to the fears of the too cautious Vicar-General). When he had heard the doctor's verdict, Francis called his two companions and made them sing the "Hymn of Praise" once more. They sang, and wept as they did so; and when they came to the end, the Saint repeated his last addition to the Canticle:

"Praised be my Lord for our sister, the death of the body, from whom no man escapeth. Woe to him who dieth in mortal sin! Blessed are they who are found walking by thy most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm."

But Francis did not want to die in the palace of the Bishop – he was away at the time on a pilgrimage to Monte Gargano. He had been, and still was, devoted to the Bishop, but it was not his house, nor the house of Lady Poverty; it was not there that he had received from God the revelation of the apostolic life, it was not there that he had founded his Religion. The spiritual Francis, and his Order, were born at the Porziuncola, and at the Porziuncola he wished to die. It must have been a hard matter for the Assisans;

but this last wish of the Saint was inflexible. They consoled themselves by reflecting that he would still, when there, be within the confines of the Commune, and they could keep a careful watch over him.

He left the Bishop's palace carried on a small hand-litter, and the Saint with his little cortège made their way through the city gate, the one between the Porta San Pietro and the Porta Moiano, now walled up. Once more the Saint breathed the free air. Descending the hill for a short distance, they took the road leading from San Damiano to the Hospital of San Salvatore delle Pareti, today called Casa Gualdi. When they arrived here, Francis had himself placed on the ground, turned in the direction of the city, and with the help of his companions lifted himself up to look before him. This was the place where, among the lepers, God's grace had overcome him, and from thence he could survey, without moving, the entire scene of his boyhood and his youth, of his worldly follies and his works in God. The city, in which he had both revelled and preached the Gospel, rose up before him, red and white, with its long lines of terraced houses; and round it the pale hue of the olive slopes blended with the soft serenity of the autumn day – those olives through which he had so often walked on his way between Assisi and the plain of Santa Maria; high above it loomed the green woods and bare red rocks of Subasio, refuge of his solitary meditations. Francis turned to God. " Lord, I believe that, in old days, this city was the dwelling-place of wicked men; but since, Thou hast chosen it, from Thy goodness alone, to be the

dwelling-place of those who have known Thee truly, and have set before all Christian peoples the example of the apostolic life. May this city, Lord, always be the dwelling-place of those who know Thee truly and give glory to Thy name." And he raised his hand, with an effort, for he was already growing weak, and made the sign of the cross over his own country.

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At the Porziuncola Francis was to be granted a last earthly consolation. He wanted to send word of his approaching death to Lady Giacoma dei Settesoli, who, after Clare, was most dear to him, and he dictated a letter to her in which he asked for a piece of grey cloth to patch his habit, and some sweet almond cakes which he had eaten in her company in days gone by. The letter was written, and they were considering who should take it, when a knock was heard at the door. It was Giacoma, who in her prayers had seen Francis lying sick, and had known his wishes.

Women could not enter the cloister of the Porziuncola, as the Brothers reminded the dying man. But Francis cried: "Brother Giacoma need not keep the ordinance about women: open the doors, and bring her here." And Brother Giacoma entered, carrying the gifts he wanted; and she resolved to stay with the Saint until the end. He assured her that she would not have long to wait.

The Lady Giacoma's company did not make him forget his Lady Poverty. He had himself laid on the bare earth, and stripped of his habit; but his "Guardian"

Brother, with a pious artifice, wrapped another's habit round him, carefully reminding him that he had borrowed it and that Francis could not bequeath it to anyone. In simplicity of spirit Francis accepted the subterfuge. Then he bade his last farewell to the Brothers, saying how grieved he was that he could not look upon all his sons before he died. He laid his hand on the head of all those present, beginning with the Vicar-General, Brother Elias, and blessed them all, near and far, present and to come. Then he intoned, with the last thread of voice that was left to him, the psalm: "I raised my voice to call upon the Lord"; and he had still enough strength to add at the end: "The just await me in the recompense that Thou shalt give me." Then he had read to him the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, in which it is related how Jesus, having loved his disciples to the end, desires to wash their feet: it was the passage to which he had so often appealed to instruct the Ministers of his Order in their duty. And with the Gospel still before his spiritual vision, he called for a piece of bread, broke it, and gave the Brothers to eat, doing for them what Jesus had done for the Apostles at the Last Supper. He had brought Christ among them once more in all his works that he had done; and he brought Him once again to them in that last moment, in profound and faithful piety.

After this he fell to pouring out his soul in praise of God. He called upon the Brothers to join in his praises, and all creatures likewise, repeating the hymn that he had composed, and bade welcome to his Sister Death. It was the evening of October 3, and the sun had hardly set, when

Sister Death came. While all were weeping in his hut, a flock of larks swept down upon the roof and there alighted, with shrill cries and a flutter of wings. They had come to carry up to heaven the soul of him who had so loved them.

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In the circle of mourners round the body were Brother Elias, Brother Leone, and the Lady Giacoma. The first was to proclaim on the following day, in an encyclical addressed to all the Brothers throughout the world, the glorious sainthood of the dead Father, and the miracle, as yet unknown, of the stigmata; and he would accompany the body to Assisi, in triumphal procession, interrupted before San Damiano by the lamentations of Clare and her companions. And he was already meditating the vast Basilica which, erected over the grave of the Saint, should spread the glory of the Order over all the earth; Empire and Church would have to reckon with it. Love for Francis inspired him with all this will to power. Ugolino of Ostia, the Cardinal who, better than any other, had seen in Francis and his Order a magnificent instrument of the Roman Church, was about to become Gregory IX. In the years that were soon to come, the Friars Minor were to take part in the dreadful struggles between the terrible champion of theocracy and the crafty and obstinate Cæsar, and they were to cross land and sea bearing the papal letters of excommunication and crusade against the Emperor. But they were not merely to be messengers and propagandists:

the Friars Minor aspired to the highest ecclesiastical posts, though commonly by more normal means than those adopted by Brother Leone di Perego, who, only fifteen years after the Saint's death, when asked by the Milanese to indicate someone worthy of the vacant bishopric, suggested himself: and, having once become Bishop, arrogantly placed himself at the head of the noble against the popular party. The case of Leone di Perego is an extreme example of the inevitable transformation which, by thrusting the successors of the " Poor Brothers of Assisi " on to episcopal thrones and the rectorial chairs at universities, into papal legations and communal and intercommunal arbitrations, compelled them to take part in the whole life of their time, no longer as a leaven of renewal, but as one of its principal elements, with all the medley of good and evil that is characteristic of ordinary life.

Behind Leone, came a very different company, not so considerable, but still numerous. The company of Brothers who, unknown to the world, and hidden from the multitude of their Brethren, or more often buried in the solitude of their hermitages, would keep alive the memory of Francis, their poor and humble founder. For them the Rule and the Testament would be the words of the Gospel, and with them all the sayings of the Father, collected and handed down like sacred relics. Cheerful sacrifice, poverty that is the soul's wealth, simplicity, and joy, would find a refuge in their hearts. They would still carry on manual labour, and wander freely, preaching to the people and enlivening their discourses with songs and mimicry, jests

and satire. But not even these would understand how to preserve intact the Father's mighty ideal. The fortress of poverty and apostolic life, of contemplation and activity, would inevitably collapse beneath their feet. With men like Leone and Egidio the hermit's life had won the day, because they thought that only in hermitages could Franciscan poverty be practised in its entirety.

Giacomina dei Settesoli stood for the whole Italian people that mourned the Saint. No one before Francis had brought men of this earth so near to God; nor did any that came after him. And yet no one had been nearer to them, more akin to them. In him they had seen Jesus pass through their lands and cities, conversing with them and sharing their lives. He had raised their eyes to heaven and sanctified the earth, promised them paradise and yet made earth more blessed and more holy. He had made them feel the supreme value of the treasures of the soul, above and in exclusion of material possessions, and he had shown how happiness lies in our own hearts. He had pointed out God in all His creatures; and thus he had taught them to look upon the world with the eyes of a poet, to take delight in sounds and forms and colours – joys and riches at the disposal of all who came and went upon the earth.

But Francis had not been an æsthete, nor did he idealize Nature. The beauty of created things was but a sign and a glorification of the greatness of his Creator; together with his cheerful enjoyment of the world, the moral life was always present to his mind, both combined with a unique love of God and of humanity, but a love that recognized

laws and duties. The loving friend of lambs and birds had known how to say to merchants that they must not steal, to men in authority that injustice and oppression brought forth oppression and injustice, to prelates that poverty and humility, not wealth and pride, were Christ's gifts. By his words and his example he proclaimed that it was the duty of all to work, and that it was not lawful that any man's possessions should deprive his brother of the means of life.

The Italian people, left to themselves, could not, with nothing but the memory of the acts and sayings of the Saint, translate the ideal reflected in them into full and effective life; nor could the Order of the Minorites achieve this for them. The new society, which was to embody new feelings and new needs in a complete and vigorous unity of conscience, did not mature. And yet the spirit of Francis had left behind it so intense a memory that it still remains through the centuries as an everlasting leaven of pure religion, joy of heart, and true holiness.

A NOTE
ON THE TYPE
IN WHICH
THIS BOOK IS SET

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This book is composed on the Linotype in Bodoni, so-called after its designer, Giambattista Bodoni (1740–1813) a celebrated Italian scholar and printer. He drew his letters with a mechanical regularity that is readily apparent on comparison with the less formal old style. Other characteristics are the square serifs without fillet and the marked contrast between the light and heavy strokes.

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